

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC PLAYSTATION XBOX MOBILE



REVIEW: UNCHARTED

THE MUST-HAVE PS3
GAME FINALLY ARRIVES

SA EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

CRYYSIS

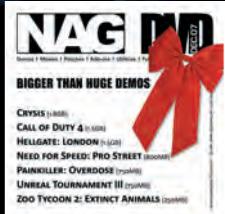
ALSO...

HELLGATE: LONDON
RATCHET & CLANK
LEGEND OF ZELDA
SAM & MAX SEASON 2
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PGR 4 AND MORE...



AN UNREAL HISTORY

There will be a
quiz afterwards



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Watch for walls being punched over.



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VOL 10 ISSUE 9 12.2007
SOUTH AFRICA R39.00



12



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PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360™



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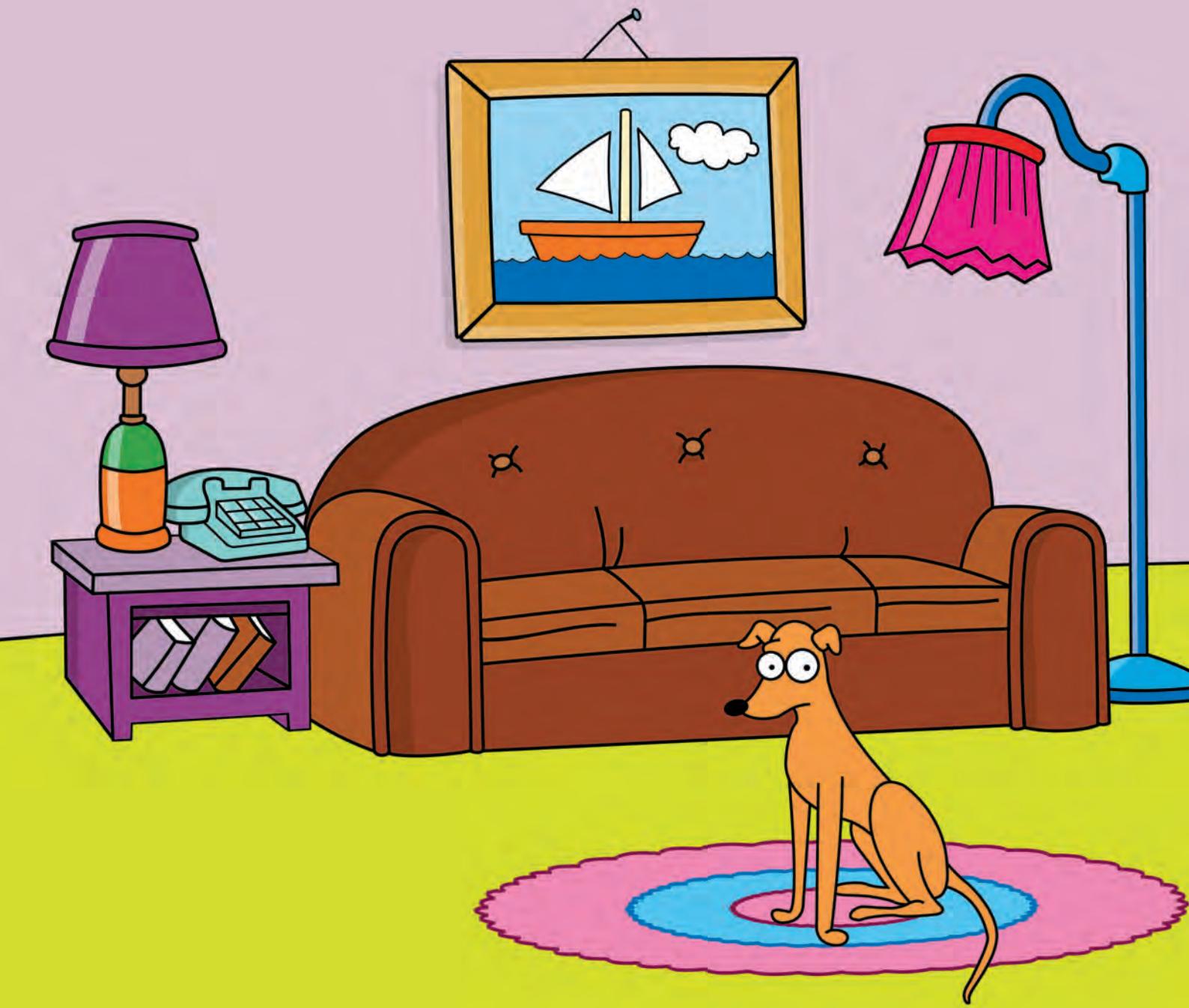


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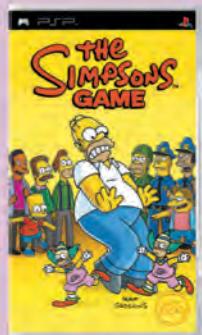
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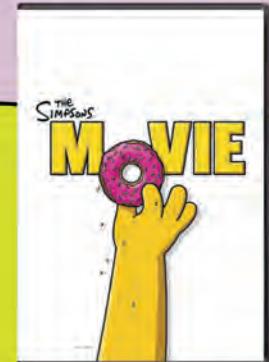
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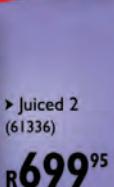
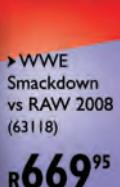
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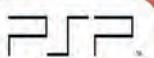
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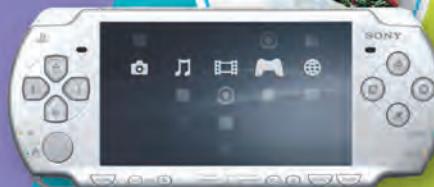
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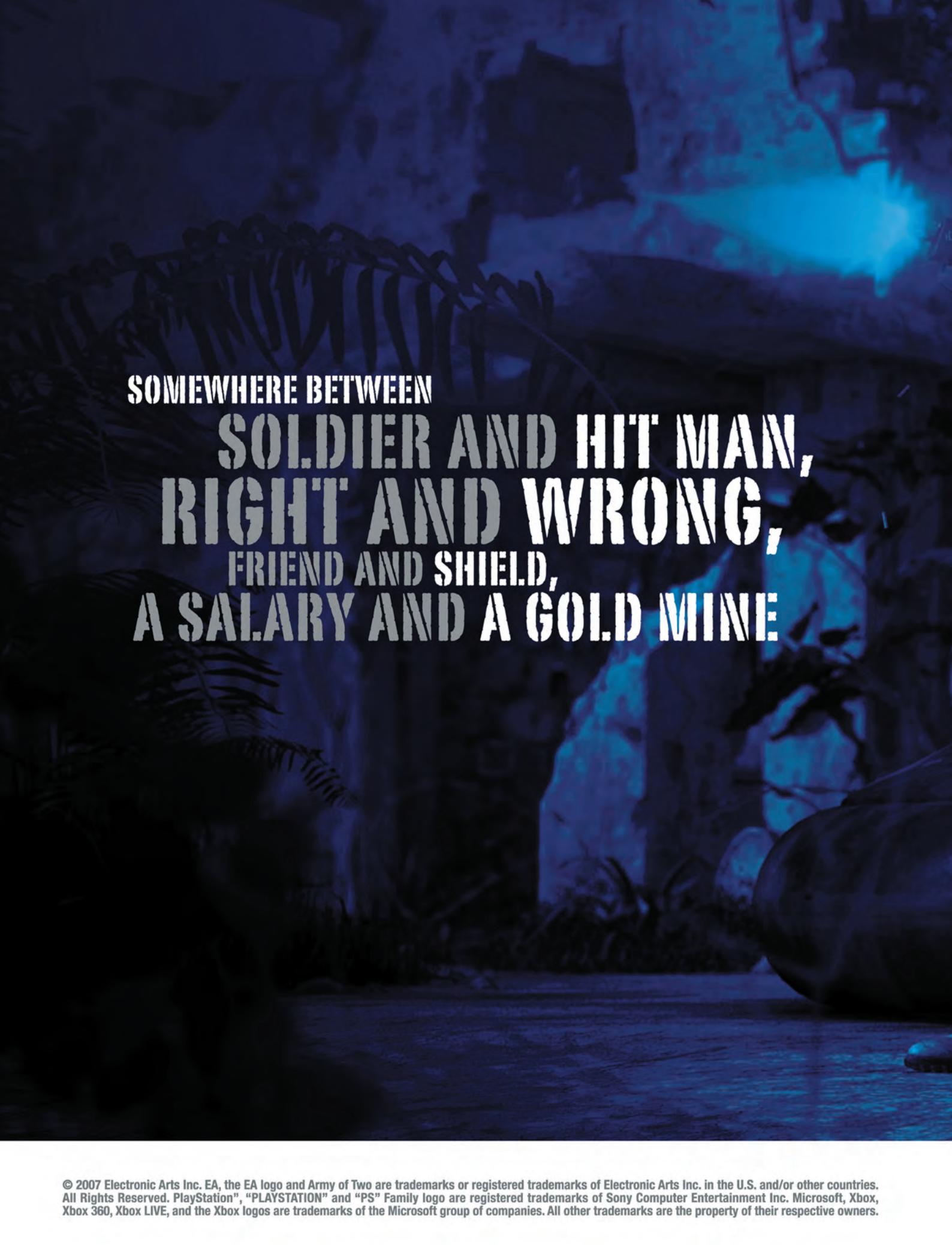
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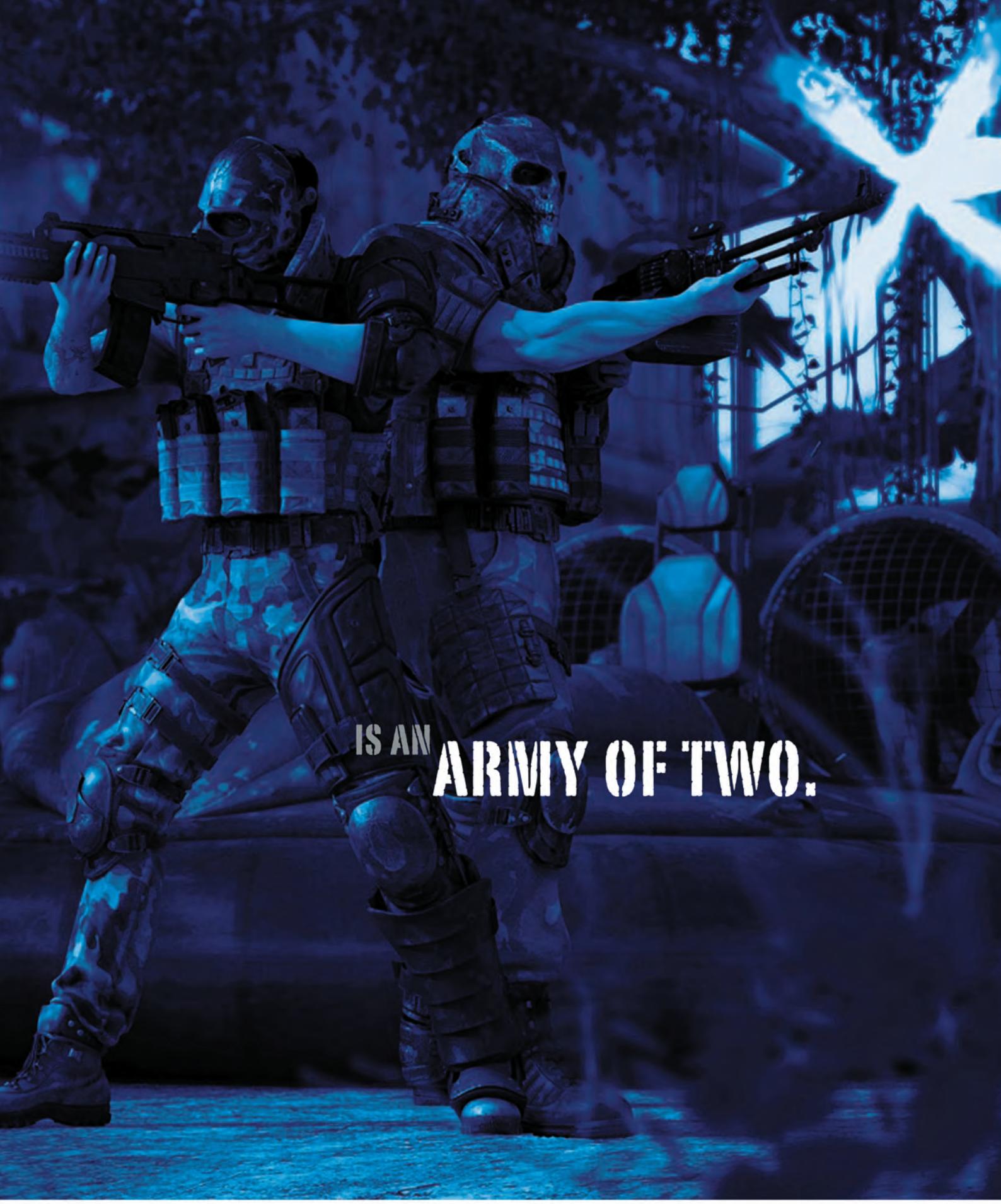
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PLAYSTATION.3

XBOX 360

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ON THE DVD



DEMOS

- Call of Duty 4
- Crysis
- Hellgate: London
- Need for Speed: Pro Street
- Painkiller: Overdose
- Unreal Tournament III
- Zoo Tycoon 2 Extinct Animals

DRIVERS

- ATI Catalyst v7.10
- NVIDIA ForceWare v163.71
- NVIDIA ForceWare BETA v169.01

FREE GAMES

- Dwarf Fortress
- Toribash

GAMING UTILITIES

- Quake Wars Tweaked

INDIE DEMOS

- Atlantis Quest

PATCHES

- Enemy Territory: Quake Wars
- World in Conflict

- rAge 2007

UTILITIES

- DisplayFusion



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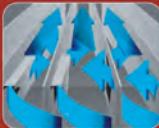
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BIGGEST LEGAL THREAT**FROM:** Cavig**CASE:** Letters killed the Inbox page

OKAY, I'VE GOT A few gripes that I wish to share. Now hold the defensive sarcasm Ed. My problem isn't with NAG at all, but rather with some of the idiotic letters you guys choose for the magazine every month. This has been a while coming and I finally lost it when I had just opened up my shiny new November edition and began reading through. I hit the letters section and came across yet another idiot talking about things he knows much less of than he thinks he does. This time, Valve are the poor victims. Let me clear something up for him: *The Orange Box* is not the only way to acquire *Half-Life 2: Episode Two* – you could just download the full version separately, or buy it separately through various media, Amazon being choice. I personally have yet to get my hands on a hard copy of *HL2*, and have yet to enjoy *Episode One*, so I bow down to Valve for this package. Now, your single-minded approach to Valve's marketing has no grounds, other than topicality, to be printed in NAG, yet it is. And it doesn't stop there! There's another idiotic, yet topical, letter

in the September edition where the guy says he cannot name a game without violence... *The Sims?* Sports games? Has he never enjoyed the *Need For Speed* series? Not even *FIFA*? I haven't seen any death in *LocoRoco*. Open your eyes and smell the carnage! Non-violent games are EVERYWHERE! You just choose not to look at them! Ah, that feels better. Please Ed, try to publish letters that are more deserving of their places in the mag, and leave out all the topical duds that people send. Other than that, after five years of buying NAG, I can safely deduce that you guys absolutely rock! Publish That!

This sounded like a legal issue, so we sent it to Legal. We just really sent everything to legal. So, without further delay: it is safe to assume that this individual will not attempt to encumber the company (NAG) with any kind of legal action. Instead, his ire is directed at specific readers and we would advise that the company distances itself from this issue. Furthermore, we would recommend that more funds be moved to the offshore accounts, in case any repercussions might surface.



The 'Biggest Legal Threat' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH

What do you think 2008 is going to hold?

professional, but we happen to have a few of those on the payroll. If the complainant wishes to involve NAG in his litigious actions, our professionals will find no problems with the victim. If he seeks to let NAG benefit from his actions, we can have him declared blind as a bat.

FROM: Duran Harris**CASE:** PC culture

As a CONSOLE GAMER since the age of 7, I have only in the past 3 years had the resources to enable myself to experience the finer points of the PC gaming sub-culture, i.e. expensive graphics cards, cooling, overclocking and hardware discussion. My induction to the PC fan base was not smooth though. Initially, I cursed myself for crouching over my mouse whilst PS2 owners (whose entire system cost 1\2 the price of my GFX card) were splayed across their couches like some tropical disease. Apart from technical insight that I have gained as a result of my persuasion, the often emotional banter between NV, ATI, AMD and Intel fanboys has also been a source of great entertainment. I do feel better off now though. These myriad interests now far outweigh any misconceptions of consoles bringing me greater joy. (Plug and play has just gotta reach maturity sometime, hey.) On an altogether darker note: I'm under the impression that gamers exist in some sort of twilight zone, completely immersed in their digital worlds. What disturbs me is that although we are already physically and sensually surrounded by the most advanced form of entertainment in the world, we still end up disenchanted half the time. As if it's very nature is both an aphrodisiac and barrier to content!

FROM: Danny**CASE:** Games reviewed by readers

FIND MYSELF COMPARING THE reviews of NAG against those of IGN, Gamespot, trustworthy hardware reviewers, etc., before I purchase a product (software/hardware). What I noticed especially in the reviewing of games is that I can trust NAG reviews slightly more than other resources as you constantly keep a standard on open-minded views, the trend of the day and what the consumer can most benefit out of. Tasting the food before the meal if you wish, but doing so one can easily lose your appetite. I don't know how you guys manage a professional level in journalism while maintaining the job without having it become tedious. Well, I have a proposal if it is not too much of a burden. Why not each month have the biggest game review of an issue reviewed on your Website by the readers of NAG and then post their arguments in the following issue – get the people's opinion? Not only will your review be compared to the consumer of the product's review but also the consumer of your magazine (the reader). The review doesn't have to be long, a few good brief ones would do, thus filling in gaps of your reviews unnoticed. These reader reviews would also serve as an alibi that yours are not deceitful and incoherent. Just a thought.

Yeah, sure. Send in your reader reviews – just keep them short. We'll hopefully get a section up for that soon. Meanwhile, according to our Legal department, we consulted labour laws on this and it seem all right. However, we will require reader reviews (here forth to be referred to as Amateur Non-Commercial Contributions) to be released by the writers (here forth to be referred to as Amateur Non-Commercial Contributors) by signing the attached document. We only require a signature on the last page and for each of the other 537 pages to be notarised. Please request that they send the signed forms in triplicate.

FROM: Louis Steyn**CASE:** Graphics Overkill

MUST SAY I QUITE enjoyed *Bioshock*, and I think it has the most realistic water effects I've ever seen, even with Direct X 9. Still a gaming junkie after all these years, I gobble up all the latest titles, so I have gotten used to "bloom" and "HDR" by now. Then my friend, who is more of a casual gamer, had a go at *Bioshock*, to see what all the "wow" is about. He was playing the game for ten minutes when he suddenly got up and walked away. I asked what was wrong, and he replied: "I can't see a thing when I shoot. Everything blurs." This made me look at the game in a more critical way, and I realised: What we have here is graphic overkill. Everything is just too shiny and bloomy, and things DO blur a lot when you get hurt. Then I bought *Colin McRae DIRT*, and for the first time I started to seriously hate HDR. Gone are the nice, crisp graphics and brilliantly realistic dust clouds of *CMR 04*. Instead, the bright orange road makes your eyes water, and the car glows with the same insane colour, which makes it practically invisible on the road. The game is a pain to play, because it needs a dual processor to run these nauseating graphics, which doesn't look half as good as the previous generation efforts. I think they've gone totally over the edge with visuals, and buggered everything up in the process. Stop it already, and get back to reality!

Maybe your friend needs glasses. Legal is a bit more creative: it might be the case that the 'bloom', 'HDR' and 'wow' might have rendered damage to the person's eyes. Obviously, it would require the opinion of a certified health

Why not each month have the biggest game review of an issue reviewed on your Website by the readers of NAG and then post their arguments in the following issue – get the people's opinion?

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ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Orange Box and Hellgate both demand broadband connections. What do you think of that?

Cleric: I hate it. I have fast Internet at work, so don't have a need for it at home... except to activate games. It's nothing but a reason to pirate games.

dislekcia: As long as the online systems in PC games give me useful stuff, I'm ok with it.

Gazza_N: Online multiplayer, downloadable content, and other online functionality are great ways to improve a game. The idea is solid. Unfortunately, our local broadband setup isn't.

James Donaldson: It doesn't matter if you have broadband or not, the point is in the short run it's great, but in the long run it doesn't stop piracy, gives us legal owners a headache and if they ever kill support, there goes the game forever!

Chevron: I think it's a bad idea. It encourages developers/publishers to be lazy. Games that have downloadable content should have had that content in the original package in the first place.

PerVert_Next_Door: I think it's a great way to improve the quality of games, regardless of the cost of Internet in our country.

Chainsaw dude: I don't mind, but Valve should stop making games update automatically. If people don't want to install updates, don't make them!

Adabot: I, having a suitable Internet connection, do not mind the online activation. Having said that, I believe online activation (and updates!) should be optional, with benefits like free indie games, updated game content, etc.

NeoNarchy: Another problem with online only activation & play means NO LAN! How many decent games have come out lately without LAN?

Tw1st3dTr00p3r: Personally I think that online distribution is absolutely brilliant. As an example, I purchased Bioshock via Steam, pre-downloaded it and could play it as soon as it was released in the USA. I did not need to wait an additional 3-4 weeks for it.

Crash_Run: I don't see why they shouldn't use the Internet for verification on games. It does cut down on piracy and increases their profits.

NightTimeHornet: Simple online verification is a good idea for curbing piracy. This should not be seen by developers as an excuse to sell an unfinished product that still requires numerous large updates.

ravage509: When I first got HL2 I installed it and luckily I had a connection present but the verification took forever. I think it's utter trash, and they should look at releasing their games according to what gamers needs are.

Have your say on the NAG forums:
<http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>

People in the world of computers can take the simplest concept, and turn it into a gooey mush of overly complicated vocabulary and tricksy verse that not even they can understand and could be easily explained in a fraction of the time.

*Legal here. Despite the editor's suggestions, it is not possible to sue this individual for loss of income. As he exchanged one platform for another that is also supported by the magazine, it would be unwise to try and prove that his actions resulted in financial liabilities. If, instead, he changed his patterns to spend more time collecting lawnmowers, arranging flowers or ordering small weapons parts over the Internet, it could be seen as an infringement of the magazine's rights and a situation resulting in the loss of income. He would also violate the invisible End User License Agreement (EULA) printed on the magazine's packaging. As you are aware, readers agree to this EULA when they tear the bag open. Also, tell the staff there is no such Roman law as *veni, vidi, vici*.*

FROM: Ediaan Smit

CASE: Was there really a game drought?

WOWOWOW! STOP DIE HORLОСIE, hold the clock. Game drought? No. But there are definitely delays in new games, like *Hellgate: London*, *Fable 2*, etc. that was SUPPOSED to have been released during the past few months. I'll take *Fable 2* for instance, which had a release date: September - October. But next thing I heard that it might not be expected until mid next year... What's going on? Can't the companies who release these games at least decide on a definite release date for their titles? I find myself wetting my pants every time a new, long awaited title is about to be released, only to be disappointed beyond my wits when I find the release date has been changed YET AGAIN! What's going on?

We won't repeat what they wrote, because it's twelve pages long (they charge by the page), but we think the gist of their argument was that if you think you have suffered emotional trauma due to game delays, they would like you to have their cards.

FROM: Dr. Thr0x

CASE: Who killed Resident Evil?

SINCE THE RELEASE OF the first game back in 1996, I've been a huge fan of the "Zombie, survival horror". The intense action and intriguing storyline of number 2 and 3 were even enough to make me look past the poor graphic quality of the PS1. Things got a whole lot better when "Veronica" hit the PS2 but from there it seems Capcom kinda lost the plot... and so did NAG. I don't know what you feed your staff, but it definitely isn't working! In the May 2007 issue, Justin gave *Resident Evil 4* a whopping 73/100. Did he even bother to play the game? The upcoming *Resident Evil 5* doesn't look much better either. Sure, the gameplay looks great and the graphics are amazing but I just don't see how getting beaten, instead of eaten, by a bunch of drunk farmers is anything to get excited about? Even the Movies bring shame to the name. I mean Alice, Who the **** is Alice? Is the era of the undead dead? Or are we actually gonna' see a proper *Resident Evil* game in the near future.

Oh! In the October issue, someone in your office wrote an article on the new movie, *Extinction*. My suggestion to them is to next time, try watching the movie before you review it... Or ask me to write it for you!

It is very important that whenever meeting with this individual, a lawyer must be present to represent the magazine's interest. This might just be a simple comment, but it could also be an attempt to fish for information regarding the alleged homicide of one 'Resident Evil' (here forth referred to as 'the victim'). If it is an investigation, a formal request should be made by the investigator to

interview specific people. Any claims made without proof that the magazine was involved in the alleged death of the victim will be met with swift and decisive legal action. It is possible that the investigator might try to contact the author of the article mentioned ('Extinction'). Legal will analyse this document and give more feedback soon. PS: You guys didn't kill Resident Evil, right? You can tell us. We're lawyers!

FROM: Mark Stockton

CASE: C0mput3r p5ych010g1 101

I'M CURRENTLY STUDYING AN Information Systems degree (computer stuff) at University. I have also been interested in computers (gaming in particular) since I could use a mouse. Having said that, in my experience of the world of computers I have noticed something that I really don't get; a large amount of computer related things are made out to be way more complicated than they actually are or should be. Fortunately, part of my degree includes a course with its roots in philosophy. This course teaches us to analyze a situation and come up with the most reasonable conclusion. I'm going to use this impressively sly and cunning methodology to try and get to the bottom of this issue.

This first came to my attention when I was fantastically bored and decided to read a "dummies guide to networking"... or something to that effect. The book stated that it was written for people who struggle to find the 'on' switch, and promises to make the reader a master of networking in no time at all. Needless to say, armed with my reasonable knowledge of networking, I found myself completely lost after page 3.

My university information systems textbooks and lecturers (dubbed 'Agent Smiths') are the same. People in the world of computers can take the simplest concept, and turn it into a gooey mush of overly complicated vocabulary and tricksy verse that not even they can understand and could be easily explained in a fraction of the time.

I've noticed this phenomenon in various instances. If you ask a typical computer geek (affectionately speaking) about a topic to do with computers, he/she (usually a 'he' though) will take pride in giving an unnecessarily complicated answer. When you ask someone else, they can give you one sentence that will clarify everything.

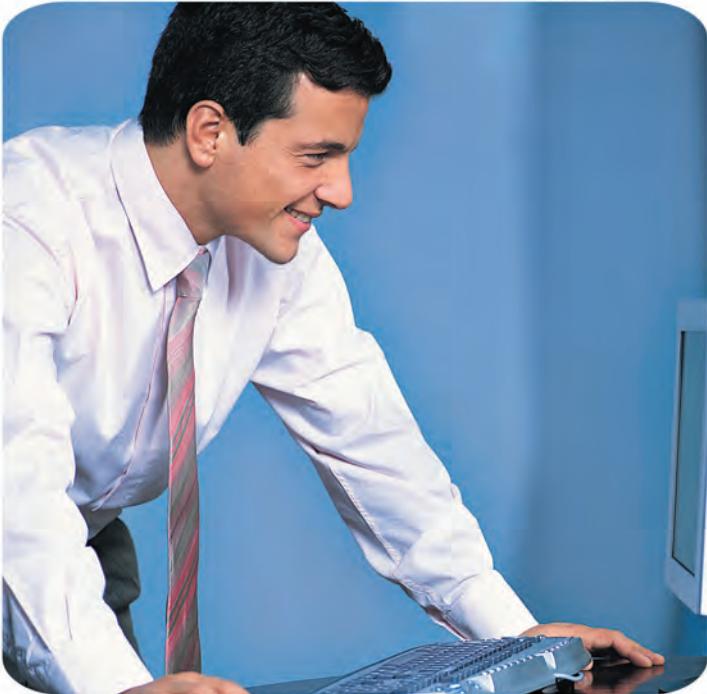
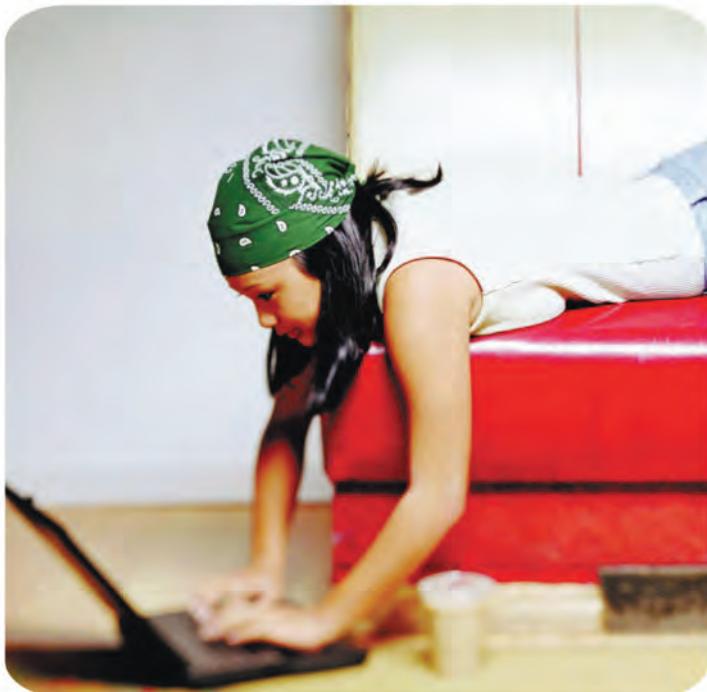
I've noticed that at LANs people boast of their knowledge and try prove themselves by speaking with gusto about the most complicated topic they can think of, like the new anti-polygronic embobulator that can quantigrate the number of GSU cycle-bibbities per second, and then look at you with mock surprise when they notice your brain trying to strangle you, and say: "D1dn't y0u kn0w tht?".. But why does this happen?

I think that generally speaking, people who were part of the 'computer revolution' were seen as being 'geeks'. Hollywood movies wrongly stereotyped them as the skinny bi-spectacled kids with weird checkered clothing. Because of this marginalization, computerily endowed people tended to concentrate on and project what made them feel justified: Intelligence, pseudo or not.

Nowadays it's not so bad. Even sporty people (some label them 'jocks') myself a jock/nerd to a degree, are interested in PC's and even in gaming, a welcomed blending of the species. However, the mentality still stands: unnecessarily complicated proves that you're smart; but actually it's often the opposite. Schw33t-a55 m4g p33p5.

Stereotypes are a bad thing. Take lawyers, for example. Everyone thinks they are just leeches sucking you dry with pointless letters, ridiculous fees and constantly trying to cover things up.

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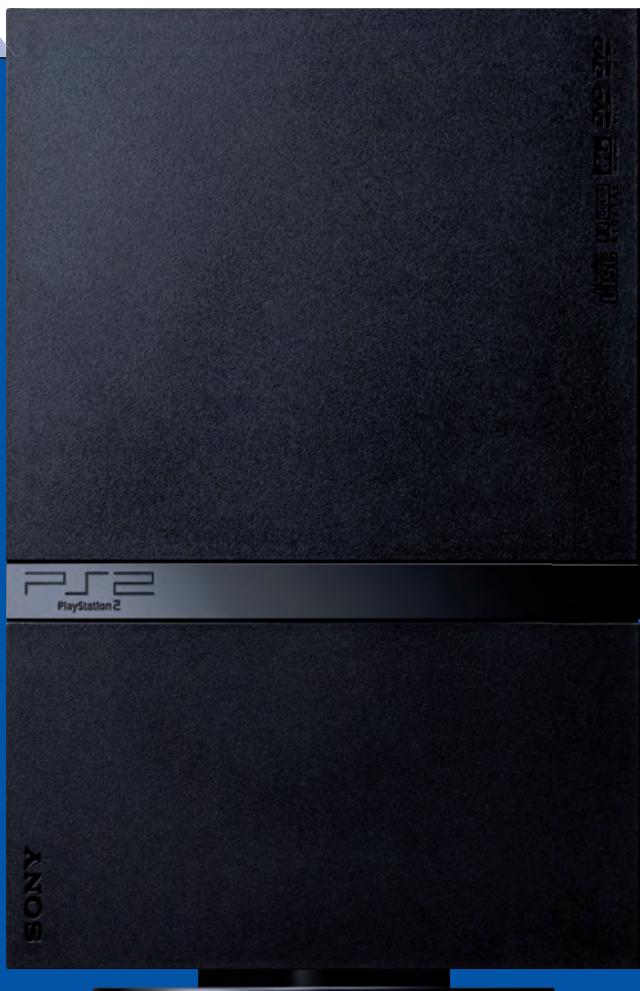
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THE RETURN OF THE PS2?

IS SONY'S WUNDERKIND MAKING A COMEBACK?



ALL OF THE WORLD'S attention is currently on the next-generation consoles and speculation on who will be the winner, especially the fate of the PlayStation 3. But while Sony sits awake at nights worrying about its new platform, the predecessor is starting to look stronger and stronger. The PlayStation 2 recently celebrated its seventh year in existence and reached an important landmark: over 120 million units sold worldwide. Sony expects it to keep doing well

and has projected that 12 million more units will be sold by the end of March next year. This despite some reports from analysts who point to slowing PS2 software sales. But those statistics only focus on the US market. Rob Dyer, COO of developer Crave Entertainment, said that he expects, the developer will make most of its sales from PS2, Wii and handheld titles this holiday period. The view is echoed by other industry people as well, who point to the strong title line-up the PS2 has.

But even if it is slowing down significantly, there is no argument that the PS2 is making Sony money while the PS3 is still a loss-maker. The system doubled Sony's latest losses and the PS2 is clearly the platform keeping things afloat. Thus, it makes sense that, as MCV reported, Sony is considering a new version of the PS2. The site reveals that the new PS2 will have a built-in power supply and possibly a high-definition output. Best of all, it might retail for a cheap \$99.

THE SINGLE PLATFORM FUTURE THEORY

FIFA 2020 SCHEDULED FOR EXCLUSIVE SET-TOP 5000 RELEASE?

IN A RECENT INTERVIEW with the BBC, EA's head of international publishing, Gerhard Florin, made a rather startling prediction. Bemoaning the inherent development hassles of a multi-platform industry, Florin declared that we're likely to see rival systems give way to a single unified platform within the next two decades. EA, a game development and publishing behemoth, currently juggles a release roster spanning 14 different platforms, including PC, console, and portable devices.

"We want an open, standard platform, which is much easier than having five that are not compatible," he said. "I am not sure how long we will have dedicated consoles – but we could be talking up to 15 years."

And Silicon Knights' chief Dennis Dyack agrees. "Imagine a unified platform, one console for all gamers – that would bring a massive paradigm shift to the games industry, where games would become better in quality, cheaper, and more widely available," he told OXM. "Sound good? It can happen. Better yet, it's inevitable. It will happen. A one-console future is a future I think we can't avoid – and thankfully, it's a future where everyone would win."



Gerhard Florin

The 1984-like creepiness of that statement notwithstanding, where's the imperative to innovate and one-up the competition when there simply isn't any? Prominent games consultant, Nick Parker, proposed that, "There could be a Nintendo channel, a PlayStation channel and an Xbox channel on your set-top box."

Let's hope the planet explodes before then.



HALO 3 BLAMED FOR BOX OFFICE SLUMP

HALO 3 OUTPERFORMS ALL MOVIES DURING ITS OPENING WEEK

IN THE FIRST WEEK that *Halo 3* was launched, gamers worldwide managed to rack up over 40 million hours of online game time with about 3.3 million copies sold. This translates to an average of 12 hours per gamer online. These facts, while astoundingly good for the games industry and Microsoft in particular, were of great concern to movie executives. The concern came from their poor weekend box office sales during the first week of October.

Naturally, they would seek someone to blame for this and it just so happens that they chose the game

industry for the release of *Halo 3*.

According to their sales figures, their major movie to open that week was the new Ben Stiller movie titled *The Heartbreak Kid*. This movie, which cost an estimated \$80 million, only racked in about \$14 million that weekend. The other top movie, *The Game Plan*, starring The Rock, only made \$2 million more.

While this could be due to the fact that these movies might be absolute rubbish, *Halo 3* has broken single-day records in all areas that were previously held by *Spider-Man 3*, *Pirates of The Caribbean* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.



"PURE, UNADULTERATED TRASH"

MODERN VIDEOGAMES MAKE ATARI FOUNDER CRY

NOLAN BUSHNELL INVENTED VIDEO gaming in 1970. And now, nearly four decades later, he's not especially pleased with the status quo. "Videogames today are a race to the bottom," said the founder of iconic game company Atari in an interview with *Electronic Design*. "They are pure, unadulterated trash and I'm sad for that."

Well, *PONG*'s gotten a bit stale, Mr Bushnell, and we like shooting stuff. In a subsequent interview with GameTap, however, he conceded that this damning criticism extends only to a "narrow segment" of available titles, and went on to praise the

innovative features of games like *The Sims*, *Spore*, *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Guitar Hero*, as well as the Wii console. What really troubles him, apparently, is the ever-popular moral panic whipping-boy, *Grand Theft Auto* series, and, you know, the decline of civilisation. "The reality is kids play that game, and it really not only doesn't teach you anything [of value], it teaches you the wrong things. It values antisocial behaviour."

Of course, this might all be nothing more than covert promotion for his new family-orientated uWink restaurant enterprise, which offers tabletop gaming to diners.



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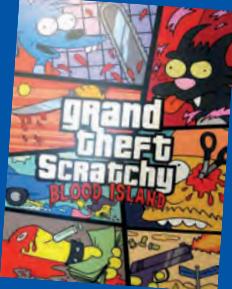
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SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

Last month we reported that Rockstar had the **Grand Theft Scratchy** content removed from **The Simpsons Game**. This is apparently a rotten lie and nothing was taken away.



The **Assassin's Creed** books are no more. The books were due to be released as a trilogy, but apparently the ancestors of ancient assassins got involved and demanded a lot of changes to the books. No, we didn't make that bit up. Now the books have been scrapped thanks to all the tampering.



Guitar Hero developer **Harmonix** has revealed that it's already working on something else. No more details, except that it won't require a special instrument-shaped controller. Maybe, finally, an Amplitude sequel?



After many years of great service, the Famicom, N64, Super Famicom, GameBoy and GameBoy Pocket are not going to be supported by **Nintendo** anymore. The company says support parts are becoming hard to come by. We're surprised they still actually cover the SNES after all these years!



The next **Soldier of Fortune** game is on its way, but not if you live in Australia. The country added to a long list of banned games, citing this latest shooter, citing the different ways characters can be maimed and killed. Funny, we thought that was the whole point of getting SOF.



GOW NEARLY MISSED MP

THE CREATOR OF **Gears of War**, Epic Games, was put into a tight situation while developing the game, according to its president Mike Capps. Apparently he was so unhappy with the multiplayer element that he wanted it left out of the game entirely. He told the developers that if it was not pulled together by E3 that year, they would have to leave it out. This also just happened to be the day before E3 took place. Well, it just goes to show that miracles do happen, because that very next



day the Multiplayer element was ready and the game took away with them almost every award at the Expo. Mike Capps was also not happy with the use of the song from the movie, *Donnie Darko*, called *Mad World*, in their commercial. He was again proven wrong, because even the commercial won awards.



CHINA (KINDA) BANS COMPUTERS

ACCORDING TO CHINA.ORG.CN, SEVERAL prominent Chinese universities are taking the perhaps overly radical step of banning computers for first-year students. This includes those taking computer science!

"At Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Hubei Province, no freshmen including those who major in computer science are allowed to own computers. The school shut down the freshmen dormitory network and freshmen are not allowed to log onto the Internet without permission. China is home

to 30 million online gamers, many of them college students. Addiction to online games has been found to affect undergraduates' ability to learn, causing headaches for many schools."

The move comes as a direct result of the university authorities trying to control the students who have "rather weak self-control", as they believe that "taking the time away from games would help them develop good learning habits". Or, more simply: too many Chinese students are playing MMOs instead of studying.



HITMAN NEARLY GETS NEUTERED

Fox's upcoming movie based on the *Hitman* games is apparently a very violent affair, given that the game series isn't really soft on the subject, nor is the director hired for the job. But rumours then surfaced that Fox has hired Nicolas DeToth, the man who did the *Die Hard 4.0* PG13 cut, to edit the movie down from an R rating and that director Xavier Gens had been sacked. But Variety dispelled this, quoting a source and a Fox representative, who said the movie is keeping its hard R. That makes sense, since all the *Hitman* games are mature as well.

In other game movie news, Sony and Capcom have announced that a CG *Resident Evil* movie is in the works, while *Turok* will be getting a straight-to-DVD animated movie - both due next year. Meanwhile, *Onimusha* and *Castlevania* have both been green-lighted as movies. The vanishing act of the year, *Halo*, might also not be gone. Even though the project was dropped by Fox, Peter Jackson's spokesperson revealed that the movie's producers (including Jackson) and Microsoft are actively seeking another distributor. Meanwhile pre-production is still underway at effects house WETA.

NO WII PRICE CUT

THE INCREASING SUCCESS of Nintendo's Wii gaming console brought about major price cuts from both Microsoft and Sony on their competing consoles. However, although its rivals made price cuts, Nintendo has ruled out making any price cuts on the Wii yet. This, according to Nintendo president, Satoru Iwata, is due to the fact that even now, after almost two years after its initial release, Nintendo is having difficulty producing enough consoles to satisfy demand. The Nintendo Wii will also be getting some very interesting new network features such as the ability to send someone a game as a gift over the Wii Network.





EA BUYS BIOWARE/PANDEMIC

INDUSTRY GIANT ROLLS A NATURAL 20 FOR "PROCURE EVERYTHING"

AS PART OF ITS five year plan to own the universe, EA has gone ahead and acquired VG Holding Corp, owner of BioWare and Pandemic studios, for about \$ 860 million. "This acquisition fills up a gap in our genre line-up," said EA CFO, Warren Jenson. "We are currently underrepresented in key genres: RPG, action, and adventure." Which probably means we'll be seeing *Mass Effect 2* and another *KOTOR* within the next three to four months.

"These are two of the most respected studios in the industry and I'm glad to be working with them again," added EA CEO, John

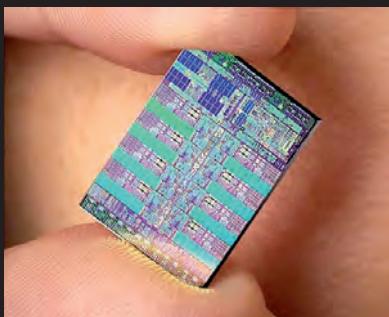
Ricciello. "They'll make a strong contribution to our strategic growth initiatives on quality, online gaming and developing new intellectual properties. We also expect this will drive long-term value for our shareholders."

And long-term value might be all EA has to offer at the moment, following the recent disclosure of its ghastly \$195 million losses in the second quarter. The company is now undergoing massive "restructuring as part of a plan to better align cost with revenues", which mostly involves firing lots of people and closing an entire facility in England.

THE POWER OF CELL

AS A GAMING MACHINE, the PlayStation 3 is proving to be a hard sell. A high price point and talk of being quite tough to program games on has kept the machine at bay while its competitors made inroads into the market. But one of the aspects that Sony has been marketing for the machine, the advanced Cell processor, has gained a whole audience of fans from research departments. Since you can install Linux on the PS3, researchers have been wiring PS3s into clusters and using custom code to do super-computer level calculations at a fraction of the price. Dr. Gaurav Khanna is one of them – he uses eight of the machines at the University of Massachusetts to do astrophysics calculations.

"Typically I'd use a couple hundred processors – going up to 500 – to do these same types of things," he told Wired. Likewise, the PS3 has been helping the Folding@home project to crunch protein sequences. The project recently broke



a Guiness record, becoming the first distributed computer network to surpass the petaflop performance mark.

Alas, this does not all translate into good fortune for Sony. The company recently sold its Cell manufacturing facilities to Cell partner Toshiba for over \$800 million in order to raise cash. But Sony is still a partner in the manufacturing of Cell.

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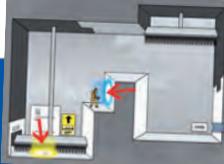
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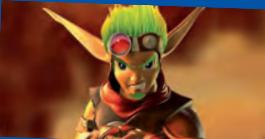
UBISOFT



A Flash game based on *Portal* is available for you to play. Sure, it lacks the humour, but you still have lots of devious puzzles to beat. Head to http://uploads.ungrounded.net/404000/404612_Portal.swf



Natasha Henstridge and Carl Lumbly have signed up to act in the video sequences of *Kane's Wrath*, the upcoming C&C expansion. No nudity is expected. Damn.



Naughty Dog is toasting its success with *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, but the company hasn't forgotten about its other series, *Jak and Daxter*. The developer's president said he "fully expects" another game for the duo.



FUNimation, owner of the *Dragonball Z* license, has threatened to take the game rights away from Atari unless the two can resolve some issues about breaches to the licensing agreement.

John Carmack and Armadillo Airspace ran into a snag when their Lunar Lander's engine exploded during a trial for the X Prize Cup. We guess rocket science IS tougher than game development.



Valve's **Gabe Newell** still doesn't like the PS3. Speaking to *EDGE Magazine*, he said that the PS3 is a waste of time. In the past he's called it a total disaster. Maybe he also doesn't like the short USB cable.



THE BAFTA AWARDS

BIOSHOCK WINS BEST GAME, WII SPORTS WINS MOST, SIMS CREATOR INDUCTED, CRACKDOWN NOMINATED LOTS

THE BRITISH ACADEMY VIDEO Games Awards 2007 has come and gone. Here is everything you need to know.

RealTime Worlds is celebrating. *Crackdown* for 360 was nominated in five categories and won two awards in the Action and Adventure category as well as Use of Audio. "We were over the moon at being nominated at all, never mind being up for as many as five," commented Phil Wilson, producer of *Crackdown*. The BAFTA winners are as follows:

Action and Adventure: *Crackdown* (360); Artistic Achievement: *Okami* (PS2); Best Game: *BioShock* (360); Casual: *Wii Sports* (Wii); Gameplay: *Wii Sports* (Wii); Innovation: *Wii Sports* (Wii); Multiplayer: *Wii Sports* (Wii); Original Score: *Okami* (PS2); Sports: *Wii*

Sports (Wii); Strategy and Simulation: *Wii Sports* (Wii); Story and Character: *God of War 2* (PS2); Technical Achievement: *God of War 2* (PS2); Use of Audio: *Crackdown* (360); BAFTA One's To Watch Award: *Ragnarok*; PC Work Gamer's (voted by public) Award: *Football Manager 2007* (PC).

Creator of *The Sims*, Will Wright, joined Alfred Hitchcock, Charlie Chaplin and Steven Spielberg by being inducted into BAFTA's Fellowship this year. Hilary Bevan Jones, Chairman of the Academy said, "Will's immense, creative body of work and his continued contribution to the industry make him a most worthy recipient of the Fellowship and being such a pioneer. We are thrilled that he will be the first person to receive this honour".



FREE GAME OF THE MONTH: TORIBASH 3.0

<http://www.toribash.com/> [ON THE DVD]

"*Toribash* is a turn-based rag-doll physics fighting game. You fight the other person by manipulating your joints every turn to do moves. Thus, it's completely free-form."

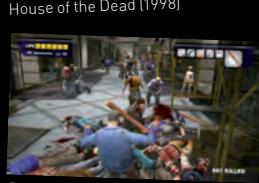
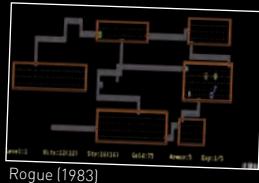
WE'VE FEATURED TORIBASH IN the Free Game of the Month section before, but the new version 3.0 deserves its own mention. Some of the new features include a shader-based render engine that improves the visuals dramatically, the ability to create scripts and mods (check out the included Lightsabers mod) and you can customise your character's colour scheme and use your own image for the head. There is now

full league support for the online play, if you like a competitive edge to your gaming.

If you really want to see what *Toribash* is capable of, be sure to browse through the included replays – some of our favourites are amazingboxing4.rpl, bestheadflipEVER.rpl, Clean Relax Headkick.rpl and slamdunk.rpl.



THE EVOLUTION OF: GAMES WITH ZOMBIES

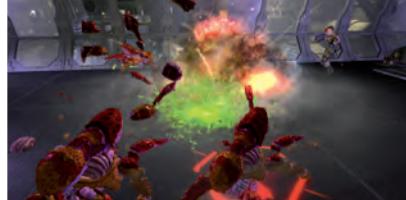




MOVERS AND SHAKERS

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: CIRCLE of Doom

Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom prepares to cleave your head into two as it gears for a February release. • **American McGee's Grimm** is finally becoming a reality. The episodic game series will start its 24 episode run on Gametap next year. • Another **Rygar** has been announced and it's called Rygar: Battle for Argus. Will it be better than the 2002 PS2 game? Here's hoping... • US gamers will be able to buy **Burnout: Paradise** in January. Hopefully we'll not have to wait longer to get it as well. • You're going to have to wait a bit longer for some foul-mouthed co-op action. **Army of Two** has been delayed to next year, because EA wants to "get the title right." • **Turok**, the upcoming UE3-powered dino-killer game, will now have a bigger audience! The game has been confirmed for a PC release along with the next-gen console versions around February next year. • **Silent Hunter** fans can look forward to more stalking and fighting from under the sea. An expansion, Wolves of the Pacific U-Boat Missions, is being developed for the series. • There might be a few **Warhammer** games on their way, but the MMO incarnation has been delayed. **Warhammer Online** is now only due next year – perhaps only in September. • Konami's stocks took a slight dive when it announced **Metal Gear Solid 4** was being delayed, again. The game is now only being released in Q2 of 2008. • Strategy fans rejoice (or cringe). **Supreme Commander** is heading towards next-gen consoles. **Space Siege** also appears bound towards the 360 first. • **FIFA Street** is returning in its third incarnation. This time it sports a whole new stylised look and is due somewhere middle of next year. • Capcom is planning a bumper! The publisher announced that **Okami** is heading for the Wii, **Lost Planet** is PS3-bound and **Street Fighter IV** is coming as well. It also added a new IP: **Dark Void**. • There have been a few rumors, again, that Rare is working on a proper sequel for **Perfect Dark** to make up for the last one. But Rare refuses to comment on this. • Have you heard of the horror title **Sadness**? It's in development for the Wii, but you won't see it for a while. Developer Nibris has delayed its release to 2009. • Another **Castlevania** game is in development for the DS. More hasn't been revealed, though, and an official announcement has yet to be made. • The wait is almost over! **Devil May Cry 4** will be released on the 360 and PS3 in February. • The rumour-mill has suggested that we can expect **God of War 3** and **Gears of War 2** by the end of next year. • **Timesplitters 4** has been officially announced.



BEST OF R99 TITLES

ACTIVISION



Call of Duty Deluxe Edition



Doom 3



GUN



Madagascar



Return to castle Wolfenstein: Extended Edition



Return to Castle Wolfenstein



Shark Tale



Shrek 2



Soldier of Fortune II Gold Edition



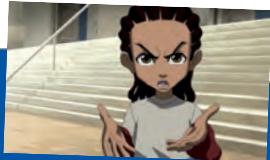
Spiderman 2 The Movie



The Movies



Vampire the Masquerade Bloodlines



Speculation is rife that a **Boondocks** game might be on the way for the PS3. The source? A Boondocks strip talking about its own PS3 games. But what would you do? Go into major rants and then get the white dude to kidnap Oprah?



Alas, **skate** fans won't be getting any extra content from LIVE. According to producer Scott Blackwood, the team doesn't want to sell "shirts and shoes" to fans. Instead, we can expect big things for the next game.

Wii fans, there is a slight chance that **Assassin's Creed** could appear on the console. Well, very slight. Producer **Jade Raymond** said it would be possible, but it would also be a very different game. We guess that's a no, then.



The popular TV show **Top Gear** has teamed up with Polyphony to supply content for **Gran Turismo 5**. Specifically, Top Gear episodes will be viewable through the game's GT TV service and a special test track will be included.

Even though Psychonauts sold poorly, there are plenty of people hoping for a sequel. Speculation was rife when images saying 'Coming Soon' appeared on a related site. Alas, those were just place holders for the current game. No sequel is being worked on.



Warner Bros. has hired Jerry O'Flaherty *Gears of War*'s art director has been signed to direct the *Thundercats* CG movie. His experience we don't doubt, but he says he plans to keep it authentic. So does that mean Lion-O will ramble strange monotone commands throughout the entire thing? Snarf!

CONSOLE WATCH

MICROSOFT INSIDER DEAN TAKAHASHI claims Sony has been "pleading" with third-party developers to ensure that support remains strong. • Microsoft Japan announced a price cut on 360 hardware bundles in Japan and a new limited edition 20GB Value Pack (includes Forza 2 and Viva Piñata but no HDMI cable). • September charts saw the 360 outsell the Wii in the US for that period by about 20,000 units. Halo 3 is believed to be the cause. • ChartTrack confirms that PS3 hardware went up by 178% due to the new 60GB and 40GB bundles. • Screen Digest's Ed Barton told Gamesindustry.biz that neither Wii shortages nor rival price drops will dent Nintendo's ongoing dominance. • Nintendo's market value has hit an all-time high of 10 trillion YEN (\$85 billion) - the highest it has ever been according to Reuters. • Capcom explains that high development costs on the PS3 are the reason they took the series to the Nintendo Wii. • Vijay Pandre, leader of the folding@home distributed computing project, has given high praise to PS3 owners for helping boost the project's processing power. • Midway has said that manufacturing delays of Nintendo Wii units have had a direct effect on their roll-out and thus their bottom line after Midway's questionable Q3 financial results. • Midway also mentions that they have solved their technical issues with PS3 development. • A Sony spokesperson mentions that the new 40GB PS3 is still using the older 90 nm chips but does feature an updated design that has lower power consumption. • In Japan the sales gap between the Wii and PS3 has narrowed to a 2-to-1 margin in October

(September saw a 3-to-1 margin and June had a 6-to-1 margin). • Import retailers are warning non-Japanese consumers that the DualShock 3 (Sony's vibrating contrition controller) will be in extremely limited supply due to high demands. • In conjunction with the launch of the new 40GB PS3, Sony has launched a new PS3 marketing campaign to help bolster sales. • Microsoft has warned that those who choose to share online accounts for the sake of being "Achievement whores" may face a permanent Xbox LIVE ban. • Nintendo of America President, Reggie Fils-Aime, believes people are playing Wii now "more than ever" and that concerns over the Wii being a fad remains "overblown". • Sony's recent earnings announcement saw operating losses more than double at the game division and Sony expects that operating loss could exceed ¥100 billion (\$876 million) ending next March. • Former Turbine and Harmonix developer, Jason Booth, recently attacked "PS3 misconceptions and spin" by saying that the PS3 does not have more power than the 360 and that game designers are trying to "match PS3 games to 360 games at best". • Nintendo has revealed six month net sales for the end of September at ¥694.8 billion and an increase of 132% on the year with sales outside of Japan representing over 77% of the company's total revenue. • Will Wright has proclaimed that the "Wii is the only next-gen console". • Xbox LIVE has hit India bigtime with tons of extra features, exclusive content and downloadable Bollywood films. South Africa's still waiting.



EPIC LAWSUIT DISMISSED

THE BATTLE BETWEEN SILICON Knights (Creators of *Too Human*) and Epic Games (developers of the Unreal Engine) continues with both parties having a claim against the other. Unfortunately for Epic, their claim to have Silicon Knights' case dismissed has been denied and both cases will now be going into the discovery period. VP of Epic Games, Mark Rein, seems to not be worried about this and stated that he is confident that the case will reveal Silicon Knights to have breached its contract. Silicon Knights, on the other hand, is also quite confident that they will indeed win. So far no court date has yet been set but this case could very well take a very long time to get to a verdict. It is uncertain as to who is actually at fault here but one thing is certain: Everyone will be watching this case very closely because of the number of developers that use the Unreal Engine.



RARE SAYS VIVA PIÑATA WAS BADLY SUPPORTED

Developer of the critically acclaimed, very colourful yet macabre piñata-animal mating and gardening simulator, *Viva Piñata*, has questioned why its owner Microsoft decided to back *Gears of War* with the high-profile marketing campaign that they did, instead of dedicating appropriate resources to *Viva Piñata*. Software engineer James Thomast feels that the new "family friendly" property lost out because of Epic's *Gears of War*, which enjoyed a bigger marketing budget from Microsoft that helped it climb the worldwide charts.

"Most interestingly I think from our point of view, it was interesting to see how the marketing budget was split last Christmas, because obviously everyone knew that Microsoft were publishing *Gears of War* and *Viva Piñata*," said Thomas, talking to Gamasutra. "It was a bit like, 'what about the other franchise?' I think we got left in the wake somewhat. Hopefully the PC version this Christmas, it might get something of a second wind."



LARA'S A PRICY DATE

HAVING SPARKED A FLURRY of speculation last month, Ubisoft has since announced that it will not be annexing SCI-Eidos after all. The acclaimed *Tomb Raider*, *Hitman*, *Deus Ex* and *Thief* publisher recently became an acquisition target after its top executives admitted to having made some unsound industry predictions, rendering the company's future somewhat gloomy.

But its valuation failed to align with the "profitability criteria" of the French publishing and development monolith, which is really just corporate spin for "Uh, no, it's too expensive". A Ubisoft spokesperson confirmed that the company "has no intention of making an offer for SCI-Eidos. We are looking at other opportunities for external and internal growth, which can create more potential value for shareholders."

Ubisoft has recently furthered these aspirations and opened new development studios in Chengdu, China and Casablanca, Morocco. In the meantime, remaining industry vultures, Time Warner, EA, and an as-yet unnamed Chinese firm continue to circle the beleaguered SCI-Eidos.



MANHUNT 2 GETS HACKED

Rockstar's *Manhunt 2* has had a rocky start to get to retail shelves. It was refused an age rating in several countries, most notably the US and UK. Then the game got re-rated on a new build and the ESRB decided to award an M restriction, but the UK's BFCC still opted to effectively keep it banned. Now a new problem arose – to get the new rating, Rockstar added black and white filters and such over the killing scenes. But a few hackers discovered that you can remove the effects by modifying the code, leaving the scenes in their full gory effect.

But to do this requires a modified PSP. Rockstar also quickly made it known that it submitted the change to the ESRB and that it can't be held responsible for the hack. The ESRB agreed and said it found no problem with Rockstar's role in this. It also had nothing to do with an illegal, uncensored version of the game being leaked online – this was apparently thanks to a Sony Europe employee. But the company is not blame-free – the *Manhunt 2* manual neglects to credit any of the now-defunct Rockstar Vienna team. That's not very nice...

GAMING CHARTS

Look & Listen

DVD • CD • GAMES — MP3 • ACCESSORIES



September figures provided by GfK
www.gfsa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Lair
- 2 Haze
- 3 Need For Speed: Pro Street
- 4 Assassin's Creed
- 5 Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction

XBOX 360

- 1 Assassin's Creed
- 2 Jericho
- 3 Crash Of The Titans
- 4 Project Gotham Racing 4
- 5 Halo 3

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Need For Speed: Pro Street
- 2 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 3 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 4 MotoGP 07
- 5 Buzz! The Hollywood Quiz

PC

- 1 Crysis
- 2 Hellgate: London
- 3 Empire Earth III
- 4 BioShock
- 5 Jericho

PSP

- 1 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 2 Crash Of The Titans
- 3 Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights
- 4 Sims 2 Castaway
- 5 Pro Evolution Soccer 2008

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 FIFA 08
- 2 Heavenly Sword
- 3 Resistance: Fall of Man
- 4 MotorStorm
- 5 Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2

XBOX 360

- 1 Halo 3
- 2 Bioshock
- 3 Halo 3 Legendary Edition
- 4 FIFA 08
- 5 Gears of War

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Rugby 2008
- 2 FIFA 08
- 3 Test Drive Unlimited
- 4 Burnout: Revenge
- 5 Need For Speed: Underground

PC

- 1 The Sims 2 : Bon Voyage
- 2 Medal Of Honor: Airborne
- 3 BioShock
- 4 Enemy Territory: Quake Wars
- 5 Lord of The Rings: Battle For Middle-earth

PSP

- 1 Transformers: The Game
- 2 300: March To Glory
- 3 Tekken: Dark Resurrection
- 4 Need For Speed: Carbon
- 5 Full Auto 2: Battlelines

R99



Star Wars: Empire at War



Grim Fandango



Star Wars: Republic Commando



Star Wars: Battlefront



Escape from Monkey Island



Star Wars: Racer

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THE NUMBERS



\$40 MILLION

Nintendo's ad spend for the first half of 2007 (source: Mediapost)

\$1 MILLION

Sony's ad spend for Ratchet & Clank: Tools of Destruction (source: MCV)

\$1 BILLION

Sony's latest game division losses (source: Sony)

\$165 MILLION

Xbox division profits, thanks to Halo 3 (source: Microsoft)

\$33.5 MILLION

Midway's Q3 2007 loss (source: Midway)

\$10 MILLION

Borrowed by Atari to survive (source: Atari)

\$172 MILLION

Ubisoft's game sales for Q2 2007 (source: Ubisoft)

200

the number of developers working on MGS 4 (source: Gamasutra)

\$85 BILLION

Nintendo's current market worth (source: Reuters)

1 MILLION

Copies of Resident Evil 4 shipped for the Wii

73%

The percentage of next-gen console owners who don't watch HD movies (source: HD DVD Promotion Group)

CALENDAR

DECEMBER RELEASES

Subject to change

Day	Game	Platforms
4	Medal of Honor: Airborne	PS3
6	Cars Mater - National	PS2
6	Cars Mater - National	PS3
6	Fury	PC
6	Pursuit Force Extreme Justice	PSP
6	SOCOM: Tactical Strike	PSP
6	Squad Commander (Warhammer)	PSP
6	Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow	PSP
7	Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	WII
7	Cranium	WII
7	FlatOut: Head On	PSP
7	Nitrobike	WII
7	Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance	PC
	<i>Pre-order for only R252.86</i>	
8	Wipeout Pulse	PSP
10	Half-Life 2: The Orange Box	PS3
	<i>Pre-order for only R518.36</i>	



Nintendo

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Release list and special offers provided by www.kalahari.net



Day	Game	Platforms
13	ATV Offroad Fury 4	PS2
13	Donkey Xote	DS
13	Donkey Xote	PC
13	Donkey Xote	PS2
13	Donkey Xote	PSP
13	Hour of Victory	PC
13	Lord of the Rings Online Gold Edition	PC
13	Patapon	PSP
13	Uncharted: Drake's Fortune	PS3
	<i>Pre-order for only R578.76</i>	
14	Geometry Wars	DS
TBA	Alan Hansens Sport Challenge	PS2
TBA	Alan Hansens Sport Challenge	PC
TBA	Bob the Builder: Festival of Fun	DS
TBA	Bob the Builder: Festival of Fun	PS2
TBA	Cheggers Party Quiz	PS2
TBA	Cheggers Party Quiz	PC
TBA	Coded Arms 2: Contagion	PSP
TBA	Darstardly and Mutley: Pigeon Pursuit	PS2
TBA	Dewy's Adventure	Wii
TBA	Johnny Bravo	PS2
TBA	Mr Bean	PS2
TBA	Paddington Bear	PS2
TBA	Singstar Next Generation + Microphones	PS3
TBA	Stranglehold	PS3

EVENTS

- 12 NAG Office closes until 3 January 2008
- 13 Staff X-Mas Partay!
- 16 Day of Reconciliation
- 20 January NAG Magazine on sale!
- 24 Full Moon
- 25 Christmas Day
- 26 Day of Goodwill

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject [December Caption].



DECEMBER CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:

"Redtide's reaction when he found out how much it would cost to upgrade his PC to run Crysis."



NOVEMBER WINNER

"The battle between HD DVD and Blu-ray continued throughout the night."

- Rennie Beaton

vivendi GAMES

RULES: [1] If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. [2] If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. [3] Obey all posted speed limits. [4] Never run with scissors. [5] There is no spoon. [6] Don't tell me what I can't do!



WE NEED A HERO

Every month, in honour of our favourite TV show, *Heroes*, we'll hide the mysterious mark of the heroes somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [*Heroes December*]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a copy of *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* for PC from Megarom!



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Christoph Bethge, p120



*24hr delivery while stocks last. Terms and conditions apply.

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Q&A MASS EFFECT

STOP AND THINK ABOUT THIS FOR A MOMENT. PRETTY MUCH ALL OF OUR SCIENCE FICTION TODAY SUGGESTS THAT, GOING FORWARD, WE'LL NEED TO CARRY SOME FIREPOWER. WE'LL EVEN BE JOINED BY ALIEN RACES THAT BRING THEIR OWN GUNS, BUT FIREPOWER IS REQUIRED REGARDLESS. WON'T THIS PROMPT OUR GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GREAT GRANDCHILDREN TO SHOOT THE FIRST ALIEN THEY MEET? NEVERTHELESS, PERHAPS THERE IS HELP FOR US ALL. PERHAPS AFTER CONSUMING ALL THAT IS THE COLOSSAL 'MASS EFFECT'. HUMANITY WILL BE SATISFIED. NOT LIKELY, BUT YOU HAVE TO HAVE FAITH. MEANWHILE, WE CHATTED TO RAY MUZYKA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AND GREG ZESCHUK, PRESIDENT, OF THE STUDIO THEY CO-FOUNDED: BIOWARE.



How large is the team that worked on *Mass Effect* and how long has it been in development?

RM: At peak, the *Mass Effect* team was probably near 120, and that's just here at BioWare. At Microsoft, it's probably as high as 60 or 70 people, so this is a really huge project for us collectively. We've been officially working on *Mass Effect* for over three years now, but it's really the culmination of many years of visualisation of what our 'ultimate space adventure' would look like.

BioWare has come a long way since *Baldur's Gate*, helping define not only PC RPGs, but also how the genre can be placed on a console. Looking back, are you surprised at how far the company has come?

GZ: Back then, we certainly had no idea that BioWare would ever grow to this point; we simply wanted to develop good games and have a lot of fun doing it. Our company values of quality in our products, quality in our workplace, entrepreneurship in a context of humility and integrity are as important as ever, but BioWare has certainly grown and changed since *Baldur's Gate*. However, we've been very fortunate to have attracted an exceptionally talented group of people that have really driven BioWare's success.

Do you see all of that history come together in *Mass Effect*? Is it BioWare's magnum opus?

RM: We strive to make each game better than the last, so we've taken the lessons we've learned from all our past games and coupled them with a bunch of new ideas that have never been done before. The result is *Mass Effect*, which I think is truly our biggest, most-immersive and best game to date – at least until our next title!

Has the partnership with Pandemic brought anything to BioWare specifically?

GZ: We have a tremendous respect for Pandemic as a developer, and we've been fans of their games even before the partnership; so we consider ourselves quite fortunate to have been paired with them. It's been an incredibly collaborative relationship. Since the merger, the two studios have shared technology, knowledge, and resources that have been really helpful for both studios.

What prompted this partnership between BioWare and Pandemic?

RM: The overall goal of BioWare/Pandemic was to build the industry's best place for talent, and an alliance with Pandemic would serve as a launch pad for exchanging creative ideas, cutting-edge technologies, and top talent, while still retaining our distinctive cultures. When the opportunity came to work with Elevation Partners (the private equity firm that helped finance the partnership), we knew it would provide both studios with the ability to rapidly support new game consoles and ensure each title had the necessary resources to achieve the highest quality. As a result, BioWare/Pandemic Studios became one of the world's best-funded and largest independent game development houses. We're also excited and optimistic about BioWare and Pandemic's future working with Electronic Arts as part of the EA Games Label, once that transaction



(which was announced a week ago) closes in the next few months.

Is there any chance of a third *MDK* game? Would BioWare like to develop a third title or a remake of the first?

GZ: Never say never! We had a great time with the *MDK* series but right now, we're too focused on making *Mass Effect* the best it can be. We have some as-yet-unannounced ideas in the action-RPG space that we're working on right now in fact...

What is the biggest challenge when designing a good RPG? Is it the story, the system, the characters, or something else?

RM: In the case of *Mass Effect*, truly capturing deep, emotional engagement with the characters and the story was the biggest challenge we faced, but it was also one of the areas we focused on from the very beginning of development. The preparation for this really started back on *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* when we did full voice-over and lip sync combined with a great storyline in the game, and then we extended it even further with *Jade Empire* where we started adding emotional states in characters during dialogue. In *Mass Effect*, not only are you getting one of our best storylines yet, plus true freedom in how you want to respond in real time during a conversation, but we're also adding an incredible level of subtlety and craft into how characters respond to your actions. The conversations end up looking and sounding incredibly real and immersive so that no matter what dialogue choice a player makes, it feels entirely authentic, and exploration transitions to conversations and combat completely seamlessly.

Where did the idea for *Mass Effect* come from? Was it really "Jack Bauer in Space" or did that come later?

GZ: A lot of the inspiration behind *Mass*

Effect is based on creating the ultimate space adventure that would fulfil your fantasies of exploring the galaxy as part of an intensely exciting story. The "Jack Bauer in Space" idea was just one great way to describe all the morally challenging decisions you'll be facing during your adventures in deep space. The threat to the galaxy is so great that you'll have to accomplish your mission by any means necessary, and sometimes that could mean doing bad things for the greater good!

A trilogy seems ambitious and traditionally isn't a safe bet when it comes to games (even in movies it's not the norm). BioWare also seems to prefer direct sequels or new projects. Why the plans for a trilogy?

RM: The entire story arc of *Mass Effect* is so deep that the only way to tell it in its entirety is over three episodes. It's staggering how much there is to see and do in the *Mass Effect* universe, but one of our goals is for you to be able to create a unique Commander Shepard in the first *Mass Effect* and take the same character through the sequels.

Would the trilogy, if it happens, be created internally, or might the games go to third-party studios?

GZ: Those plans are still being shaped, but we do care very deeply about *Mass Effect* since it is our own original IP; so we'll certainly do what's right for the property to make sure it's the best it can be.

***Mass Effect* boasts a huge amount of side and main quests. That must have taken a lot of work to polish! How do BioWare employees go about testing scenarios for the game?**

RM: We have an extensive design phase where we come up with a bunch of creative ideas, many of which (unfortunately) may

never see the light of day simply because we just can't fit them all in! However, the ones that do make it into the game are thoroughly tested in numerous ways, including our extensive, experienced Quality Assurance (QA) team who play the game over and over to make sure it meets our high standards. Polish and quality are two key attributes of a BioWare game and everyone at BioWare (including our QA team) take these values very seriously on behalf of our fans.

Generally, most games can last around ten hours. Clearly, an RPG like *Mass Effect* takes up a lot more playtime. Thus, development of an RPG is more intense and demanding. Do you agree with this statement?

GZ: Our development cycles do tend to be longer than most, it's true, and a big part of this is because we take an enormous amount of time during pre-production to craft a rich and engaging story. In the case of *Mass Effect*, that task was even more challenging since the world of *Mass Effect* had to be invented as well! When you're designing a game that offers you an entire galaxy to explore, with creatures and elements that have never been seen before, it's hard work creating all those details. However, it's all worth it in the end.

BioWare has been breaking a lot of ground working with its fan community – from map builders and dedicated portals to the *Mass Effect* trailer made by Machinima artists. Moving forward, how do you see it grow and what plans does BioWare have for it?

RM: We've always been strong supporters of our fan community, and we're constantly amazed at the quality of their creations. We want to continue to support our community by providing them with the tools they need to create their own adventures, and also to provide them with bigger and better online services that will encourage growth and participation. Our fan community has been very supportive of BioWare over the years, so we want to make sure we continue to support them. We have some new ideas we'll announce in the future to take this even further!

BioWare moved into other realms than elves and orcs with *KOTOR* and *Jade Empire* – is this all part of a general drive to put RPGs into unique and new worlds?

GZ: Innovation in games is certainly important to us, and we love any opportunity to try new things and give fans a gaming experience that's fresh and original. For us, story is the most important thing in all our games, so as long as we're delivering a fun and exciting adventure that keeps players on the edge of their seats, our games can be set anywhere, anytime!

Does the team plan to return to the *Dungeons & Dragons* stable?

RM: We do have the epic fantasy adventure *Dragon Age* in development. We'll reveal more about that soon!

Thank you for your time! Do you have anything else you would like to add?

RM: Just to thank our great teams again; they're hard working, passionate, creative and they really care about developing great games for our fans. **NAG**



MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

YOUR GAMING HOROSCOPE FOR 2008 – PART TWO

(WITH SINCERE APOLOGIES TO MR. YANKOVIC)

IN CASE YOU MISSED it last month, the relative position of the planets and the stars could have a special deep significance or meaning that exclusively applies to only you and what games you play. Let me give you my professional assurance that these forecasts and predictions are all based on solid, scientific, documented gaming evidence.

LEO

July 23 – August 23

Platform compatibility: Whatever you consider the most powerful of the lot
So many games, so much awesome hardware, incredible gadgets, toys and technology... and you're stuck working your day job or going to school while life passes you by. Or at least, that's what you think, and you think it's totally unfair. You should be free to make your own choices, do what you want to do and enjoy the games you want to play – so why the drama? Not to be mean, but it's about time you stepped up to the plate to roar your lion roar – make some noise, announce that you're here and you're going to do what you want to do, by Zeus! Besides – kids dig a gamer dad, but be sure to give them a chance to play once in a while.



VIRGO

August 22 – September 22

Platform compatibility: Anything and everything, now and forever
You've already got a list as long as your arm of games you want to play, games that appear on every single gaming device known to man and beyond. You're picky, methodical and love it when a game surprises you with its depth and attention to detail. But you're not sure if you should be gaming – after all, couldn't your time be put to better use? Fear not, for there is no more noble a quest than that of keeping yourself happy, educated and fed – something a Virgo needs no help with. However, it'd probably be a good idea to stop eating so many snacks, you fatty fat fat.



LIBRA

September 24 – October 23

Platform compatibility: PC because of the social element, and perhaps Xbox 360
A huge game is about to hit the market that everyone will enjoy much more than you will, and you'll hate them for being such slaves to fashion. You're a gentle soul, convivial and prone to sharing your love of the finer things in life – but you're also a giant dickhead that can't spot the abrasive way in which you try to share your existence with others. Some things are too important to take seriously, so learn to laugh big grouch – perhaps then you'll start having fun playing games again by yourself instead of requiring online gaming buddies to validate your existence. Stop reading politics, it's not making you smarter.



SCORPIO

October 24 – November 22

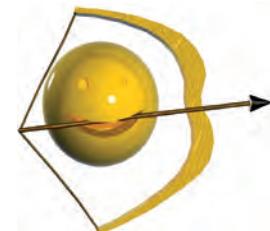
Platform compatibility: Mac
Get ready for an unexpected experience when you trip over your power cable and fall screaming from an open window. Before you die, just remember that you've always been involved in work that is meaningful; work that furthers the cosmic power of Truth. That, or you're still being taken advantage of by your demeaning job where everyone exists only to flatter or be flattered. Time to start getting persuasive and face the facts: your relationship with high-cost appliances is actually very shallow and not a very good substitute for gaming. Get back to basics – bust out the LEGO and create something.



SAGITTARIUS

November 23 – December 21

Platform compatibility: Has a soft spot for the Xbox 360 and any Tom Clancy game
You love to travel, right? Well, this may sound totally crazy to you, but every single game is a vibrant journey to an exotic location – and you even get to make your own travel arrangements. The structure of a game is one of laws and meanings. Good games place emphasis on the general 'feel' of things, leading the player along until the heart of the matter reveals itself. Stop thinking of constraints in games as limiting, and rather consider them unnecessary details. But first, you need to convince your significant other that gaming is good for you, before you end up phallus deficient.



CAPRICORN

December 22 – January 20

Platform compatibility: Whatever has the best racing/flight simulators
Capricious Capricorn, always capable of being capable. When it comes to gaming you like your experience like you like your life – built up from firm foundations and imbued with a professional, reliable sense of purpose. You can't stand fantastical games that propose wild schemes and even wilder fantasies: it's either as real as possible or you go home. Your future looks bleak, since gaming and reality have a tenuous relationship at best. It's almost time to quit your dead-end job and pursue your heart: it got a running start so you're going to have to move fast. **NAG**



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DAMMIT!

by Megan Hughes

NOT ALL FUN AND GAMES

THE FESTIVE SEASON ALWAYS seems to be the perfect time for a grumble. All the pretty lights, endless Christmas carols, and general merriment are enough to give any sane person a bit of a nervous tick. The fact that the holiday season also requires you to seriously hurt your bank account buying gifts for people you otherwise avoid the rest of the year also leaves me feeling slightly sour. This means less money for me to spend on my dirty little pastime, gaming, and the improbability that any of these people will contribute in any way to my favourite hobby.

Something that should have been able to bring me out of my wallowing in a bottomless pit of self-pity was the launch of the Nintendo Wii in South Africa. In earlier columns, I backed the Xbox 360 in the ongoing console war simply because it was either that or the PlayStation 3. I knew the Wii was available and had been selling at an impressive rate in other countries around the globe. However, because it was not here, I didn't pay much attention to it.

Around the same time that rumours of a Wii rAge launch surfaced, I started hearing about some first-hand encounters regarding the console from friends and acquaintances who had purchased their machines overseas. Personally, I have never been much of a button pusher myself, and the multi-functionality of the personal computer has always appealed to me more than a console.

However, the Wii, with its rather unusual name, was different. Nintendo's console was offering a much more interactive platform for gaming and it was cheaper than the other two next-gen consoles. Finally, here was a console I was prepared to spend my money on, even if that meant sacrificing a relatively high-end graphics card for my personal computer.

However, then the official price of the Wii was announced, followed not long after by consumer complaints. It seems that Core Group, the official Wii distributor for the South African region, forgot that most of their target market had access to the Internet as well as a calculator.

A quick search on the Net revealed that the Wii, bundled with *Wii Sports*, was being sold for £179 in the UK (www.johnlewis.com).

[com](http://www.laskys.com)). Using the official exchange rate at the time of writing (R13 to the pound), this worked out to R2,327, which obviously included a profit margin for the reseller. Even after adding VAT, this wasn't near the recommended retail price of R2,899.

So how does Core justify this pricing? Rutger-Jan van Spaandonk, director of Core Group, stated that "currency fluctuations, import taxes and the remoteness of SA from the world's major business centres all contribute to the relatively high price not only of the Wii, but of all imported consumer electronics goods sold in the country."

But wait!

Firstly, if what he said is correct – and right now I am definitely not saying that it is – then why is the Xbox 360 Core cheaper than the Wii in South Africa? They both sell for the same price in the UK (www.laskys.com), but in South Africa, there is a R200 price difference according to the prices at www.incredible.co.za. How is it that MiDigital (South Africa's Xbox distributor) is managing to sell the console cheaper while still making a profit, despite the same "currency fluctuations" and "import taxes" problems? Is Nintendo not playing fair or is Core Group overly confident in their new product?

Over and above this, there is the pricing of the games. It works out cheaper to buy through Take2.co.za (which imports from the UK on demand) than to buy Wii games at our local stores (the recommended retail prices being between R499 and R599). Surely, the distributor is buying the games in bulk and thus getting a significant discount.

Why are the consumers getting the short end of the stick?

And who is going to let Core's director get away with this sad little sexist comment (<http://www.fmtech.co.za/gaming/wiis-sa-launch-all-the-details/>): "It will still appeal to the hardcore gamer, but suddenly gamers' wives and girlfriends will want to play with them, with their Wii." **NAG**

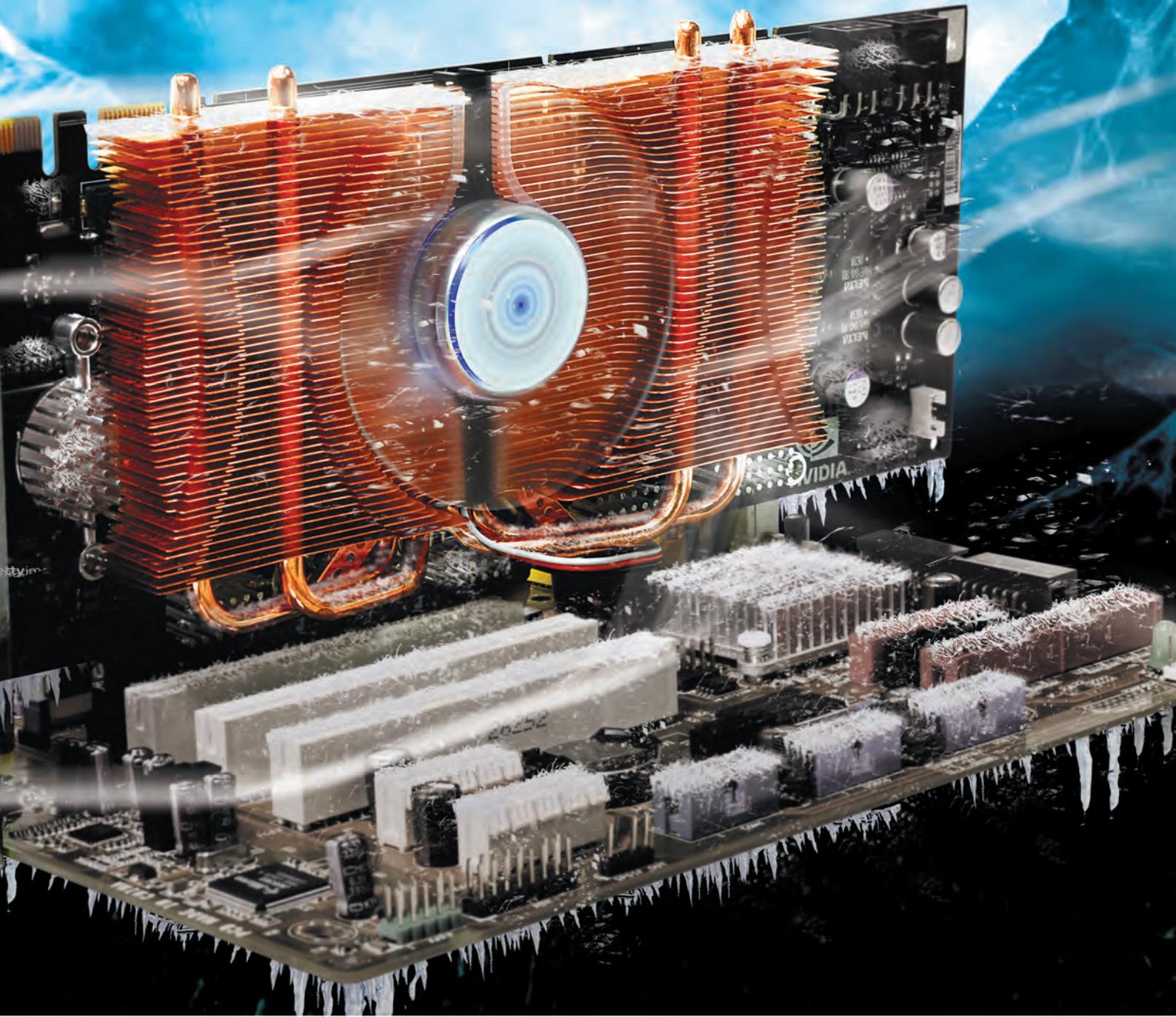


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RAMJET

by Walt Pretorius

LIMITED POWER TO THE PEOPLE

I DON'T LIKE COMPLAINING ABOUT huge organisations that are so big that no one can put a chink in their armour. It doesn't help, to be honest, to complain about these megalithic things. It's like an ant trying to budge a particularly stubborn blue whale. So, rather than wasting my breath bitching about these massive juggernauts of disorganisation and illogical action, I prefer to annoy the man in the street. However, every now and then, I need to vent about one of those blue whales. This, boys and girls, is such a time, and no; it's not Telkom this time.

I guess most of us are spoiled. I suppose that having running water and electricity and other amenities are not rights, but privileges. In fact, I know this to be true, purely because there are places in the world (in our country and in others) where folks don't have that kind of luxury; where water is a two-hour walk away, and electricity isn't even a remote possibility, save for batteries. However, these are privileges that we pay for and, when something is paid for, it should be delivered. That's a basic principle of capitalism.

Therefore, when Eskom decides that an uninterrupted power supply is too much of a luxury even for paying customers, I get a little agitated. The thing that really grinds my sack, though, is the fact that Eskom has the audacity to blame the people using the power, rather than admitting the plain truth - they screwed up.

The concept of load shedding is actually starting to get quite old. It first started in the winter months of 2007, when everyone and their mother were firing up the old three-bar heater, complete with the stench of roasting dust, to stave off the cold. Obviously, during winter, electricity usage increases. It's pretty much a given fact when considering that electrical devices that produce heat (like stoves and geysers and heaters) chew more power than others do. So, when Eskom announced that the winter would be just a little chillier due to a new programme of electrical distribution, people were sad - mainly because their heaters wouldn't work for a promised hour or two a day. Eskom blamed the necessity for load shedding on consumers using too much electricity. They also added, under their breath, that a primary source of power in this country needed serious maintenance. A nuclear facility, that is.

When summer arrived, the heaters and winter coats were stuck back into cupboards and everyone sort of assumed that the curse of load shedding would be over. However, this was not to be. See, Eskom still couldn't meet the demand for electricity, and load shedding has continued unabated, despite the lower consumption in summer.

The situation raises a question or two. Well, several in fact.

First off, why is it that Eskom doesn't produce enough power? The equation is simple, really: a population of X consumes an amount of electricity represented by Y. But the population increases, let's say by a factor of Z. Surely, then, Y should also increase by a factor of Z, purely to ensure that power demands would always be fulfilled. It's not a difficult equation, really. Of course, generating more power would require two things: effective maintenance of power plants (which is obviously not being performed); and the construction of new power-generating facilities, which is very expensive. However, Eskom doesn't need to build too many new power stations - they have a surprising number of them in 'mothballs' (probably right next to granny's coat and a 1960's three-bar heater). Why do they have them in mothballs? Your guess is as good as mine. Eskom's answers to the question are

generally evasive and inconclusive.

The second question raised is far more pertinent. How can a country's economy be expected to be stable when the only supplier of power within that country cannot meet demand? And not just any country, but one that is actively trying to encourage foreign investment. I was in a shopping mall the other day when the lights in the area went out... The mall ground to a halt. How many thousands of rands were lost in the four hours that the power was off? Did I say four hours? Yes, I did. See, the maximum of "two hours per interruption" has obviously been affected by Africa time. Hence, interruptions of up to eight hours have been reported... seriously disrupting both business and private lives.

My final question is this: Does Eskom know what they're doing? I think we all know the answer to that one.

So, Eskom, here's to you. Here's to your ability to keep our economy chugging along, to your great logic and to your amazing skill at keeping your equipment running safely and efficiently. For a moment, why don't you stop and reconsider your strategies, improve your service and, while you're at it, stick your load-shedding idea right up where the light bulb doesn't shine! **NAG**



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KINGPIN

by Michael James

TESTING, TESTING. IS THIS THING ON?

DOING THE REVIEW FOR *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* was a challenge, and for all the wrong reasons. Some background is required here. I've spent 251 hours, 40 minutes and 35 seconds [exactly] playing Battlefield 2 [my short stint into BF 2142 didn't stick. *Titan lag, I didn't like the weapons or feel, etc.*]. So, coming off my BF2 commitment into something new wasn't easy and I immediately started finding fault with the game before I even opened the box. I installed it reluctantly, wondering how much time I would have to put in until I could get away with a solid and accurate review. This negativity seemed to be coming from the realisation that it was going to take time away from playing BF2 [*something only rAge does each year; in fact, it's so bad that I uninstall BF2 a month before rAge. Apparently I have no self control*]. Anyway, back to *Quake Wars*... new controls, new thinking and a new game. Based on the Beta trial I knew I wasn't going to love it the same way I love BF2, and yet here I was, right person, wrong attitude, writing the review. Naturally I commiserated with the few people in the office who didn't like it, looking for second-hand fault finding before really trying it myself. Then one night I sat down and gave it a real chance and you know what – it's not all that bad – once you get into it. The point of all of this fluff is to highlight one of the problems facing the gaming industry, overly experienced gaming journalists or 'jaded hacks' [*as we like to insult them here at the NAG offices*]. The jaded hack has seen it all, isn't impressed with new games and all of this because playing games has become a job. I've decided to change all this and by laying it all out here in this column for everyone to see I've initiated a subconscious cleansing process and now my inner gamer, left for dead sometime between *Quake II* and *Quake III*, will be resurrected and approach everything with all the enthusiasm I'm sure I used to have in the past. Overall goal: Our primary objective is to entertain you with our opinions, writing and carefully timed screenshot taking in this magazine. Moaning and bitching about how much some new game sucks is not entertaining.

NEXT MONTH

I think this column will each month primarily deal with the reality comedy show that is the NAG office and the experiences of someone who has seen and done it all [*well most of it anyway*], someone who has dined with id Software and someone who still remembers playing the first *Asteroids* arcade machine down at the local many years ago. This is just really hyping this column up a little for next month at which point I'll be thinking, "Crap, I overhyped it and now I've got nothing sensible to write." No, this last bit isn't here to gain favour or sympathy or play down next month's inevitable 'off topic' column. This last bit is just the brutally sad and honest truth. **NAG**

Disclaimer

The irony is, thanks to the review arriving too late [my fault] and the fact that we've oversold advertising a little and the fact that everyone and his uncle are releasing games this time of the year, *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* is now going to end up in the January issue. Furthering the comedy, I wrote this column before I knew the review was getting bumped and now I only have time to add this last paragraph before everything gets uploaded to the printer. It's always the same thing: space and time; this magazine's two worst enemies.





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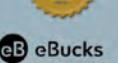
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The Reward of Choice



IT'S UNREAL!

A HISTORY OF THE BEAUTIFUL GAME.

WITH *UNREAL TOURNAMENT III* STANDING POISED ON THE 64-BIT COLOUR HDR MULTI-THREAD RENDERED BRINK OF RELEASE, FLAK CANNON IN HAND, WE THOUGHT WE'D TAKE A STRAFE DOWN DM MEMORYLANE AND REVISIT THE LINEAGE OF THIS REVOLUTIONARY FRANCHISE. STARTING IN 5...4...3...2...1...

ROCCVILLE, MARYLAND, ON THE eastern coast of America. The year is 1994. For the purposes of this dramatic reconstruction, let's call it autumn, since it conveys a subtle metaphorical suggestion of change. Anyway, in a cluttered development studio called Epic MegaGames in an apartment block somewhere downtown, a couple of geeks (we use the term non-pejoratively) have spent the night tapping away in front of their computers. One of them, a Canadian named James Schmalz, has been fiddling with a prototype for a new game, something he imagines as "a *Magic Carpet*-like environment where you fly through caverns with robots." Of course, at this point it's little more than some animated squiggles on a grid, but Schmalz is ambitious.

Fast forward a few weeks, and James is still tinkering with his demo. "I added textures to the environment to make it richer and took off the ceiling of the caverns to see if I could do an outdoor game," he recalls. "Then, medieval elements were added, and I started to add buildings to the environment. It really started looking good, but I needed to crystallise my ideas into a real vision for the product."

Around this time, company founder, Tim Sweeney, realises that his industrious pal is onto something potentially quite cool. Having decided that mapping levels on paper is somewhat Cro-Magnon in sophistication, he sits down and begins working on a level editor. Their colleague Cliff, "CliffyB" Bleszinski, is drafted on level design. That

UNREAL

Released 25 May 1998

The somewhat inscrutably-named penal vessel Vortex Rikers, designated NC114-85EKLS, crash-lands on a canyon verge, playing posthumous host to bodies, supplies, and a hostile boarding crew. Prisoner 849 (that's you) appears to be the sole survivor of this unhappy event. Narrowly avoiding capture with the clever and well-timed application of lots of bullets, he escapes the doomed spacecraft, and finds himself wandering the verdant plains and cavernous mine tunnels of Na Pali. As it turns out, the luckless natives of this remote planetoid, the pacifist Nali, have been subjugated by the Skaarj, an occupying force of fancy lizards with heavy-duty firepower and a despotic vision. Not content with simply invading the planet and seizing everything for themselves, including its deposits of Tarydium crystal, the unreasonably aggressive reptiles have taken to crucifying its hapless flower-power denizens. How dreadfully gauche. The Nali await redemption.

Prisoner 849, meanwhile, must navigate this volatile environment, make his way to the Skaarj mothership, pop the queen, and get himself off this horrid planet in a blaze of messianic daring. On the way, he kills lots of stuff.

Bricking your rig

The minimum system requirements to run *Unreal* included a Pentium I 166MHz, 16MB RAM, and a 1MB video card. Epic.



UNREAL MISSION PACK: RETURN TO NA PALI

Released 31 May 1999

Arriving a little over a year after its predecessor, *Unreal*'s expansion sees Prisoner 849, recently evacuated from the exploded remains of the Skaarj mothership, rescued by the warship UMS Bodega Bay. He's then offered a choice – return to Na Pali (not just a clever name, see?) as part of something mysteriously dubbed "Operation Talon Hunter", or be evacuated once again, only this time into the lonely cold of deep space without a spacesuit. Operation Talon Hunter, tally ho! So it's back off to the Nali homeworld for more mindless violence, and a heroic mission to recover some sort of super secret weapons log from the UMS Prometheus, a downed military starship. This mostly involves flipping switches and shooting stuff. The expansion introduced UMS SpaceMarines, Predators, and Spinners to *Unreal*'s bristling bestiary, and added the Combat Assault Rifle, and Rocket and Grenade Launchers to its arsenal.

Resourceful!

Return to Na Pali was developed by Legend Entertainment, who made thrifty use of leftover art and other assets from *Unreal*, including levels cut from the original. It was also quite renowned for its abysmal voice acting.



guy who did the Reaper Bots add-on for *Quake* is located, wooed, and recruited to write an AI. Seats in the production pipeline are gradually filled up, and momentum builds. The months sweep by in a flurry of code (rendering, collision detection, physics, networking, file system management), headaches (at some point the zygotic game became an FPS), publishing deals (GT Interactive), and caffeine (probably Mountain Dew). At some point, a squabble surrounding the game's title is settled, discarding popular contenders *Sin* and *Dark Earth*. And at the end of it all, *Unreal* emerges, wailing furiously into the steaming software-

rendered dawn of modern 3D gaming.

While progenitor 3D games like *Doom* and *Quake* had been pushing pixels for a few years already, *Unreal* effortlessly outclassed these with its 16-bit real colour environments, light bloom, volumetric fog, composite skies, high-resolution detail texturing, and enormous outdoor areas. Even id luminary and industry rival John Carmack was impressed. "The Unreal Engine has raised the bar on what action gamers expect from future products," he predicted. "The visual effects first seen in the game will become expected from future games."

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Released 26 November 1999 (later re-released on Dreamcast and PS2)

While it was generally agreed that the *Unreal* single-player experience outstripped contemporary contenders like *Quake II*, its networking code was poorly implemented and buggy, requiring a constant stream of patches. Enter *Unreal Tournament*, a single- and multiplayer frag-for-all extravaganza and subsequent Game of the Year that shook the ground menacingly underneath *Quake III Arena*. Introducing user-adjustable bot AI, an alternate fire mode for its weapons, and a sophisticated online server browser, *UT* dominated the 56K multiplayer arena, while simultaneously offering a robust and immensely satisfying single-player campaign unfettered by the superfluous complexities of anything even remotely resembling a plot. Six guts 'n' giblets gameplay modes were trotted out, including the control-point acquisition contest Domination, Last Man Standing, and the objective- and time-based wargame romper Assault, in addition to lynchpins Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Capture the Flag. Largely thanks to the ease with which players could create their own content for the game using its built-in editor, *UnrealEd 2.0*, *Unreal Tournament* still boasts an active community.

NAG recommends

Fire up a vanilla Deathmatch in the Liandri Central Core, plug in as many bots as the game will allow, and rush helter-skelter for the Redeemer on the top level. Alt-fire a guided rocket through the corridors and into the teeming central arena. Screech in triumph.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Released 1 October 2002

Released simultaneously with *Unreal II: The Awakening*, the next iteration of the multiplayer-orientated series was a bit of a hit-and-miss affair. Despite all the next-gen fizziness of the new Unreal Engine 2, introducing ragdoll physics, dynamic lighting, and particle systems, fans were crushed by the exclusion of the Assault mode and beloved Sniper Rifle (somewhat controversially replaced by Bombing Run and the Lightning Gun, respectively), and griped about changes to the game's pace and scale. Because fans like to gripe about stuff. The game also failed to register the

same impact as its predecessor, given that this sort of thing had risen to some prominence in the industry, touting formidable rivals with *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Battlefield 1942*, and *Tribes 2*. While its visuals were second to none at the time, *UT2003*'s gameplay simply wasn't innovative enough to maintain an edge over the competition. The game was quickly deprecated by a successor, *UT2004*, and all trace of it removed from record.

Click, Click, Boom

Amongst others, *UT2003* debuted the now stalwart mutators, InstaGib, and Zoom InstaGib. Try some InstaGib Capture the Flag if you're in the mood for a spot of casual masochism.



Creation

Name
Player
Gender
Male
Team
Iron Guard
Face
Brock
Skill
rage





UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Released 18 March 2004

UT2004 was pretty much the game *UT2003* should have been. Introducing new weapons, game types, and vehicles, as well as reinstating the sorely missed Sniper Rifle and Assault mode, wrapped up with all of *UT2003*'s content as well as a slew of new maps, *UT2004* was frag heaven. And just to make extra nice with the disgruntled community, the game shipped with a \$10 mail-in rebate form for people who had previously purchased *UT2003*.

Wicked sick!

UT2004 saw the inclusion of remakes

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

Released 4 February 2003 (also released on Xbox)

Terran Colonial Authority Marshal John Dalton (that's you) wasn't always a Terran Colonial Authority Marshal. No, he used to be a totally butch Space Marine (hooah!), until he was court-martialled for disobeying a superior's order and rescuing a civilian scheduled for dereliction during some disastrous campaign or other. Subsequently relocated to a cranny somewhere along the outer rim of nowhere, Dalton drifts around in his crummy little patrol ship, yearning for something more than this.

But his luck is about to turn, in the way that these things always seem to do in games (what unlikely serendipity that the cameras were around to record this?), and Dalton and his crew of misfit space brats are recalled from patrol, and shuttled off on a mission to retrieve the scattered bits of some fancy artefact.

Of course, the insidious mega-corporations Liandri and Izanagi are also hustling for the same stuff, apparently having hatched a diabolical scheme to reawaken an ancient evil. Or something. A lot of gunfire ensues.

It's never enough, though, is it?

Despite its simultaneous release with *UT2003*, *Unreal 2* was criticised for its lack of multiplayer. Developer Legend Entertainment was later commissioned to produce a multiplayer add-on, a class-based Capture the Flag-inspired game called *Expanded MultiPlayer* or XMP. Somewhat predictably, however, its popularity was eclipsed by *UT2003* and *UT2004*. Eyes rolled.

of two original *UT* favourites – the reinvented deathmatch map Deck16, now Deck17, with its super-secret sniper perch and broiling lava decor, and the Capture the Flag map, FaceClassic, pitting players in a desperately chaotic scramble between two towers on a small chunk of spacerock. A community-produced remake of the furiously frustrating *UT* original CTF map, LavaGiant, is also available for download.

Respect.

Even if your system can't support it, try readjusting and maxing out all available video options in the settings menu. The game has something to say about that.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

Released November 2007

Powered by the Unreal Engine III previously seen in *Gears of War* and *BioShock*, the upcoming *Unreal Tournament 3* has all the razzle-dazzle third-gen stylings needed to mollify impatient gamers who've been waiting nearly four years now. With high dynamic range rendering, per-pixel lighting, dynamic shadows, significantly improved bot AI, and Aeria's PhysX middleware to provide all sorts of wide-scale environmental destruction, this is a frag-flinging frenzyfest on a grand scale. As lead designer Steve Polge puts it, "We're not trying to make a prettier *UT2004*. We're really trying to make a very new game." Consequently, *UTIII* also introduces an all-new objective-based game type, resembling something of a hybrid between the Onslaught and Assault modes, dubbed Unreal Warfare. Of course, this sees the two aforementioned game types tossed, although the flexibility of the new editor will reportedly allow for Warfare level design that plays like these. Looks like Domination has been dropped, though, which is thoroughly scandalous.

A frag by any other name would gib as hard

Weapon-based honorifics have been expanded from just two in *UT2004* to almost all weapons in *UTIII*. Blagging yourself 15 straight frags with selected weapons will earn you the enormously impressive titles Gun Slinger, Bio Hazard, Combo King, Shaft Master, Blue Streak, Flak Master, Rocket Scientist, Head Hunter, and finally JackHammer for the truly godlike (or impossibly lucky).

It has hoverboards

NAG loves the hoverboards.



UNREAL DOUBLE- JUMPS TO CONSOLE

Unreal Championship
Released 15 November 2002

Essentially *UT2003* ported to the Xbox, *Unreal Championship* featured a hastily-reworked control scheme optimised for the console's controller as well as Xbox LIVE multiplayer deployment. It suffered framerate issues. Nobody was especially surprised.

Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict
Released 8 February 2005

Eschewing tradition, this was not, in fact, a port of a PC game, but a title developed specifically for Microsoft's console using an optimised and enhanced version of *UT2004*'s engine, called UEX2. Not only was this game pushing polygons faster and harder than its PC cousin, but *Championship 2* introduced features not available in previous franchise instalments, most notably the Overdose and Nali Slaughter game types, a third-person view mode, and all sorts of additional mêlée squabbling options.





MODILICIOUS

Starting with the release of the original *Unreal* back in 1998, all titles in the series have come packaged with a fully-featured powerhouse editor - UnrealEd - and its own built-in scripting language - UnrealScript - for generating and customising user-created content. These range from maps and small tweaks called mutators to total conversions, and this feature is doubtless largely responsible for the franchise's popularity and extraordinary longevity. *UTIII* will ship with a newly-overhauled build of the editor, now with an integrated play function for map testing, as well as an additional visual scripting interface called Kismet, for those with scanty programming experience.

Epic Games has always encouraged its community to take advantage of this functionality, and, together with video tech monolith NVIDIA, has previously sponsored large-scale Make Something Unreal

competitions to promote it - including prizes totalling \$150,000 for an original *UT* mod, and a staggering \$1,000,000 for *UT2004*.

The 2004 winner, a tactical WWII total conversion by Tripwire named *Red Orchestra*, has gone on to become a standalone retail product distributed through Steam, now called *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45*.

In a recent interview with CVG, Epic Games' indefatigable VP Mark Rein revealed that another contest is under consideration. "People ask me 'will there be another NVIDIA \$1,000,000 Make Something Unreal contest?' Sure, we'll round up some sponsors again and hopefully have another big, huge mod contest," he said. "This time I think it's going to be spectacular. You see so many companies have licensed the technology, mainly because of how great the tools are and how productive and creative they can be with these tools, and it's going to be that much more so for the mod guys."

INTELLEKSHUL STUFF

Two novels, *Hard Crash* and *Prophet's Power* by Ryan Hughes and Dean Wesley Smith, were shunted out alongside *Unreal's* release, expanding on the story and myth of the game's universe. There were a few snags during publication, however. Herewith follows Hughes' unedited account from Amazon's page entry for *Hard Crash*:

Many readers of "Hard Crash" might have felt that the book seemed to start in the middle of things and jump around a lot on its way to an ending. If they get to PROPHET'S POWER, book #2 in the Unreal series, they will find the beginning of the story, rather than a continuation.

There's a very simple explanation for all this. The covers got swapped in publication. As for the jumping around within each book, well, Dean Wesley Smith and I each wrote a single book, but they were shuffled together chapter-by-chapter and divided in half again to make two volumes in the series. We knew that was going to happen, so we planned the chapters to compliment each other; we just didn't expect the covers to be swapped or the bylines to read "Ryan Hughes" on one and "Dean Wesley Smith" on the other rather than both names on both books.

One last little snafu: chapters 14 and 15 of HARD CRASH got switched with chapters 16 and 17. Read 16 and 17 first, then go back and read 14 and 15.

We reckon we'll give it a miss. **NAG**

THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME...

IT'S SLOWLY GETTING TO that time of the year. The time when all the major releases are either being delayed to next year or hitting shelves now. That's good for playing games now, but at the same time announcements for new games are a bit slow. But the rush is about to begin again. Soon everyone will

start releasing info on their 2008 games, not to mention those languishing in 2009. After this month it's a whole new year. Games like *Halo 3*, *BioShock* and *Crysis* will be history and we'll wonder, "What's next?" By the looks of it, the best is yet to come.

BRÜTAL LEGEND

Developer→ Double Fine Productions | Publisher→ Sierra | Platforms→ PS3, 360 | Genre→ Action | Release→ 2008

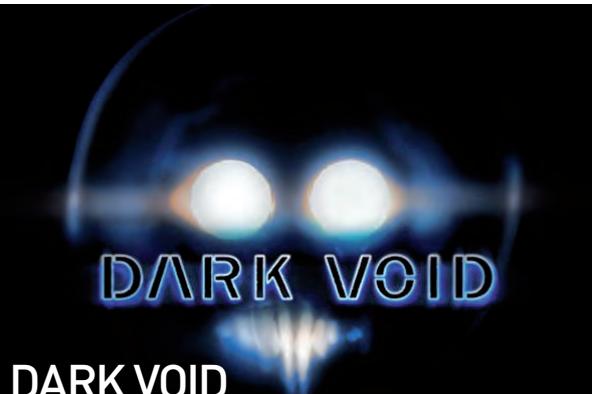
WHY IS *BRÜTAL LEGEND* the most important game you've ever heard about? Because it's the creation of Tim Schafer, a man who has developed many other games that are likely the most important you've ever heard about: *Monkey Island*, *Day of the Tentacle*, *Full Throttle*, *Grim Fandango*, *Psychonauts*. Okay, so he developed games that are important to some of us. Considering this man's developer pedigree and that he's working on something new, you need to know about it. Especially if that 'something new' happens to be a game about metal (the music) and a roadie who gets a belt that grants him god-like powers. The problem is that the belt was made for a god. But try and tell a roadie he can't keep something he found. Apparently the game is a historical reconstruction of the Age of Metal, an event that happened aeons ago and shaped the world. So this is really going to be an educational game - one with bikes, hellfire, big axes and plenty of monsters to be stomped. Obviously learning CAN be fun! Let the history lesson begin!



LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

Developer→ Capcom | Publisher→ Capcom | Platforms→ PS3
Genre→ Action | Release→ 2008

THINGS ARE STARTING TO look up for the PlayStation 3, though perhaps it is time that Sony stops pretending it's still leading the race. *Lost Planet*, one of the 360's big hits, is finally getting a PS3 port, putting to end speculation that Capcom was going to abandon the platform. But it is telling that the PC version was released before the PS3 one was even announced. Not that it matters – the good news is that PS3 owners will soon be able to trek across the frozen planet, fighting big bugs and pirates on foot and in awesome mech suits. There have been a lot of critical things said about *Lost Planet*, but most agreed it was a fun, action-packed romp that does enough things right. Alas, antialiasing problems seem to continue on the PS3 as well. But that's a minor issue.



DARK VOID

Developer→ Capcom | Publisher→ Capcom | Platforms→ TBA
Genre→ Action | Release→ TBA

MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO, aliens rocked up to our side of the universe and decided to enslave us. They ruled over us for millennia and we knew them as gods. But a few humans amongst the people developed extra powers. Called the Adepts, these people helped banish the aliens to somewhere else, where they have been stewing and plotting ever since. As you might imagine, eternal peace does not make for a good game, so the aliens turn up again. By the looks of it, you are an adept – or at least a pretty mobile guy who seems intent on running around alone. All that has been shown of *Dark Void* so far is a video containing (what we suppose is) gameplay footage. It's a really slick platformer title, in the lines of *Jak & Daxter* or *Prince of Persia*. The whole showreel is certainly very good and after playing *Uncharted* we'll believe that such visuals are very possible. Unfortunately, there's nothing else, so put this down as a third-person action adventure involving running, climbing and shooting.

SIMON THE SORCERER 4: CHAOS HAPPENS

Developer → RTL Enterprises | Publisher → Playlogic | Platforms → PC | Genre → Adventure | Release → Q1 2008

THE *SIMON THE SORCERER* series is one of the underrated milestones of the adventure era. It always managed to get overshadowed by the bigger adventure games of the time – *Simon* did hang with a tough crowd – but it made a lasting impression and two sequels were produced. The third game was some kind of terrible 3D thing and perhaps shows how badly adventure got treated as the world went crazy over polygons. The genre is slowly coming back, but strangely enough, the torch has mainly been carried by non-British European developers. Still, it took a while before a new *Simon* game appeared – as it did in Germany early this year. Now an English version of the game has been announced. It's a new adventure as Simon returns to the Magic World, where his doppelganger is causing trouble. The game returns to tradition point-and-click, using detailed 2D backgrounds with detailed 3D characters. The only real concern we have is whether the German script will translate well



into English. This series was once compared to *Monkey Island*, so it would be a pity if some of the humour gets lost in translation.

SHOWDOWN: SCORPION

Developer → B-Cool Interactive | Publisher → Akella | Platforms → PC | Genre → Action | Release → TBA

IN A FEW DECADES the world is a very different place. Due to wars and all kinds of social collapse, only a few states exist and they are mainly run by major corporations. Then someone discovers alien ruins in Sudan. Then those alien ruins go bad and cause some kind of outbreak. Then everyone nukes the site. A new company emerges, supposedly formed by the survivors of the Sudan site. This is where you come in. The company, Zenith, is involved with weapons and all kinds of nasty business. You have to infiltrate it in this cyberpunk thriller, which means you will shoot lots of stuff. Stealth will also play a role and there is a weapons-upgrade system, as well as talks of multiple storylines and clever AI. The only problem we see so far is that once again we are faced with an ambitious game from Eastern Europe – and those usually suffer from budget or quality issues. Then again, they are getting better and better.



ALL NAG CONSOLE PREVIEWS AND REVIEWS ARE VISUALISED USING THE SAMSUNG LA46M81B LCD TV

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So, have you signed up at the NAG Online forums yet? Why not? It's not like the URL is that hard to remember, but here it is again in case you missed it: <http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>. Why should you sign up at the NAG Online forums? There are plenty of good reasons: you can win prizes, talk to your peers about games (or other stuff, if you want), chat with NAG staff members and peruse the local wildlife. It's a good place to find a collection of like-minded gamers for you to appreciate or annoy (but if you're going to be annoying, don't be surprised if you don't make any friends).

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Okay, so the Wii has launched locally – fantastic. Now bring on the games, but more importantly, bring in our True Gaming Overlord, Mario. It's been too long... Mario. While *Super Mario Sunshine* was just fine, and we don't mean to complain, we could really do with something a bit more groundbreaking; a bit more imaginative. But we have faith in you, oh Mighty Plumber and Saviour of the Mushroom Kingdom. Take us away from all this, far across the Galaxy, with your super-jump! WAHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

ROCK BAND

Miktar on drums, our esteemed editor, Priest, on rhythm guitar, our fearless leader-in-chief, Redtide, on the bass – but who will be lead singer? Who will step up to the mantle and become the final piece in the NAG Office Rock Band puzzle of pure awesomeness? Who indeed. But before that, bring on *Rock Band* already! It's time to graduate from *Guitar Hero*.

CHESSMASTER XI

So we like chess. So what? We're geeks and nerds, after all. We're allowed to play chess without it looking like we're horrible nerdy intellectuals. But, part of playing chess is flexing the grey matter, pitting your wits against a foe in a turn-based simulation of war with set units. But mostly, we just play chess so we can tell people "We play chess" and bask in the obvious intellectual self-righteousness it smothers all over our bodies – because playing chess is "hard" for common folk, so they venerate those who do. And we certainly deserve veneration. And a puppy.

DUNGEON KEEPER 3

We can dream, can't we? Bring back *Syndicate*, bring back *Dungeon Keeper*, bring back *Hi-Octane*! We miss the old Bullfrog stuff so much that every night we sit down and cry a little. And then we remember *Magic Carpet*, and we cry a little more. We know it's not right to keep looking to the past when it comes to gaming, but there's no denying that certain series were certainly not done. *Syndicate* and *Dungeon Keeper*, for example, have absolutely no modern-day equivalent [no clones whatsoever with the exception perhaps of *Evil Genius* recently]. We could certainly do with more *Evil Genius* too, now that we mention it.



BEOWULF

I'LL ADMIT - I don't know much about *Beowulf*. A short while ago I did research about the whole thing, but it has since become suitably murky enough to declare that it's some poem from long ago where a guy goes to beat up some other guy and his mother. While you are frowning in disapproval and lamenting the public's increasing ignorance on what vikings and other snowdwellers carved on bark, take solace that the movie is on its way to enlighten the masses. Nearly inevitably, such a movie will have a game. Now we can all agree that license games have upped their game, so to speak, and are on a much better quality plane than they were in years before. So the stakes are high and Ubisoft is clearly eager to please.

Quite suitably, it's another *God of War* clone. But once again we can credit that to the awesomeness that is the *GOW* series. It's a working vehicle for bigger-than-life bad-

asses. Beowulf is such a lad and he wastes no time picking fights with sea serpents, crabs and ogres. Yes, crabs, but they are fun to stomp. It's a very simple affair of attack what is in front of you using the weak or strong attacks. Weapons break after a short spell, so if there is any statistical improvements (the code didn't give that way), it will be with Beowulf's own skills. Simply put, pound your way through a given situation and progress to the next situation for more pounding. In between said poundings you might be expected to scale a few cliffs or leap over the odd abyss.

You are not alone, though – your men appear to follow you and help most of the time. You can give them basic orders, but they are completely secondary allies to your pounding sessions. On occasion, though, you'll need to keep a beat and play a mini rhythm game. Do well and your men will row

**HANDS ON
TESTED**

properly or roll a large rock posing as a door out of your way.

Soon enough Beowulf and his army will run into bigger adversaries and tougher missions. The code we looked at was really early stuff. Even though quite a few levels were on display, it was still far from polished. As far as the graphics go, this alpha status seems to suspend the game between unpolished and impressive visuals. Not a groundbreaker, but *Beowulf* could be really pretty to look at. The same goes for the combat system, which, though meaty, lacks a certain rhythm.

Granted, overall it's not an incredibly impressive package. But its license roots can forgive how ordinary *Beowulf* feels. It's certainly not a terrible game and at the very least should deliver some intense button-bashing action. **NAG**

James Francis





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ACE COMBAT 6: FIRES OF LIBERATION

HERE AT NAGWE always chant our little age-old mantra that "gameplay is more important than graphics", and that much will always hold true. As much as visuals improve, games always inexorably boil down to how much fun the game is to play, regardless of how much your eyes water at the five-bazillion Pixel Shader 99-textured polygons currently composing the scene. Gameplay is what separates games from movies, after all.

Yet, even we are not immune to the siren-song allure of a game that looks so damn fine that you're almost (almost) willing to forgive actual lack in the gameplay just for the sake of enjoying those beautiful, stunning visuals just a little while longer. A good case in point: *Ace Combat 6*.

It is very safe to say that *Ace Combat* is the single most beautiful air-combat game yet conceived. Screenshots simply don't do the game justice. Up close, the terrain

texture does get blocky, but from the air (where you'll be spending most of your time) the environments are literally breathtaking. As if to reiterate the point: you can watch your entire mission progress via replay that you can slow down, speed up and adjust the camera for better angles on the action. There is a demo on Xbox LIVE Arcade and if you can, you should really check it out for yourself even if you're not usually interested in these types of games.

Spread across 15 linear single-player missions punctuated with some rather impressive real-time cut-scenes, *Ace Combat 6* is an arcade-style jet fighter blast-a-thon with ludicrous special weapons and often seriously silly drama for the sake of making the war-time plot so much more serious. The missions themselves are a little dynamic: saving a group of ground units in a previous mission might allow you to call on their aid later on,



and so forth. Beyond that, *Ace Combat 6* is exactly like the previous five in that you fly around at high speeds and shoot insane amount of missiles at increasingly dense air-battle scenarios where catching your breath may just result in plowing head first into a mountain. It's not very deep and the easily-bored may find the repetition too much, but *Ace Combat 6* wasn't made to appeal to the mainstream.

Ace 6 will feature a full contingent of online modes, including Team Deathmatch and Cooperative (the developers hope for 32 player, it's currently at 16). Our time spent with the preview code revealed a solid game that does what it was designed to do: make the player feel like a *Top Gun*, an Ace, a damn Superhero-in-a-obscenely-powerful-jet (which magically reloads missiles by having them simply pop back onto the wings, which is silly but easily forgiven). **NAG**
Miktar "Dynamic Operation System" Dracon

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KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: CIRCLE OF DOOM

STARTING LIFE AS A pure real-time strategy on the original Xbox, then segwaying through two sequels into a more RTS-meets-RPG mashup, *Circle of Doom* represents the fourth title in the series and perhaps the end of its genre exploration. *Circle of Doom* has decided to forgo all its RTS elements entirely and focus only on being an RPG of the hack-and-slash variety: an Action RPG.

The KUF series is known for striking visuals and screen-filling enemies both in size and count, and it looks like *Circle of Doom* will follow suit. The visuals are crisp, lush and rather detailed, while enemies hardly ever appear in groups of less than 10. The game promises randomly generated dungeons and landscapes, "thousands" of on-screen enemies and up to four-player co-op on Xbox LIVE. The laundry-list includes six characters each with their own strengths and weaknesses (and five to six wieldable

weapon types each) as well as over 50 abilities and over 60 spells, which can be combined with weapons to create unique weapon+ability+spell combinations. Over 70 different monsters are planned, which of course include colour variants of the same monster.

The combat system in *CoD* seems the most interesting part of the preview code we played. The game revolves around your Special Points bar, which is used both as a way of defining what equipment you can wear (items have an SP requirement) as well as forming the foundation of your attack strength, speed and capacity. Weapons use up a certain amount of SP per hit, and the lower your SP, the slower your attacks. Low-SP weapons initially seem slow, but as you level up and put points into expanding your SP bar, these weapons become faster and allow for more combination attacks. Equipping a

stronger but more SP-intensive weapon will slow your attacks down again if you don't have enough SP. After gaining a few levels, your choices expand to either using a stronger but slower weapon due to its SP use, or switching to a low-SP low damage weapon that's capable of faster, more sustained attacks.

The best example of this lay with the ranged weapons - low SP allows for rapid fire while high SP is capable of taking out groups of enemies, but with a long recharge time.

Circle of Doom holds a lot of promise with its unique take on the action RPG genre and some solid visuals, but it's still too early to get a good gauge: not much information has been released and the preview code is very incomplete. We're a bit disappointed at the lack of local multiplayer, but the promise of on-line four-player cooperative certainly does sound like a good deal.

NAG

Miktar "Epoch of Light" Dracon



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Despite the scarecrow,
someone still took all the corn.

LITTLEBIGPLANET

USER-GENERATED CONTENT IS A phrase that is getting bandied about increasingly, often in several industries related to information, communication, and technology. Websites like YouTube and MySpace, as well as a veritable host of blogging services, are great examples of how this concept is being applied online. Even cellphone companies get all hot and sweaty when UGC is thrown into a conversation.

In gaming terms, UGC has been around for a while, mainly in the form of user-generated levels and mods. Lately, though, game developers have been looking for ways to make UGC a more universal aspect of games. *Second Life* is an example (albeit a slightly disturbing one) of how game developers have allowed players to modify their virtual worlds. It wasn't the crux of the game, but it did prove to be tremendously popular with players.

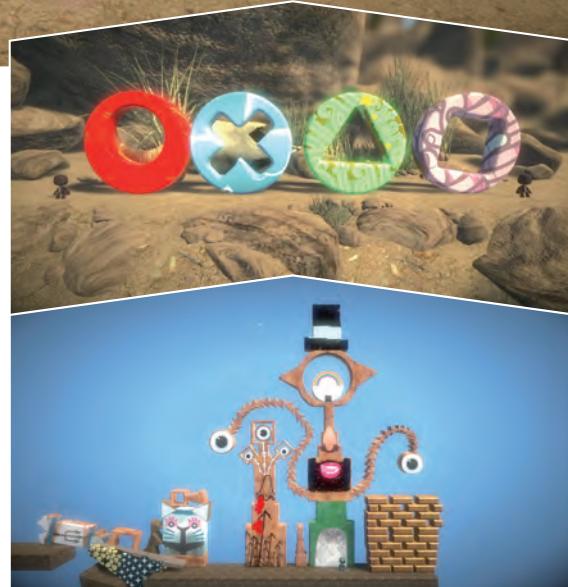
LittleBigPlanet is also about UGC, but this time it is pretty much what the game is all about. As the game kicks off, the player is given a patch of ground, which forms part of the *LittleBigPlanet* itself. The player can then modify every aspect of that patch, including their own characters and their environment. Interaction and modification with objects is not part of the game... It is the game. Best of all, though, is that this is

achieved by the simplest possible means. There is no complex sub-program or level editor that needs to be used.

It's not all about building stuff, of course, although other game aspects generally add to the whole "Let's build a virtual world" idea. Puzzles, exploration and collection of creative resources all add to the experience.

Needless to say, *LittleBigPlanet* is all about community. What would the point be in building wonderfully complex items and environments if no one else gets to experience them? That said, *LittleBigPlanet* does feature a single-player mode (although the exact point behind it, other than maybe practicing and gaining new skills, is a little unclear). An offline multiplayer mode has also been included. The developers seem to be very keen on 'collaborative projects' within the game, and make every opportunity available to participate in them.

Although the prospect of an ever-changing world, modified and created by a global community, is quite exciting, it's hardly new. We have seen online games (*Second Life*, yet again) that have featured this kind of innovation. However, what sets *LittleBigPlanet* apart is the ease with which the world and everything in it can be modified, and the collaborative nature of some of the 'projects' that can be



undertaken within the game. It is a highly creative ideal that the developers are striving for, and one that will most definitely appeal to a certain segment of the market. It's quite refreshing to once in a while come across a game that is about creation rather than destruction. This aspect, though, is what will probably make *LittleBigPlanet* a successful cult title rather than a mainstream hit. Time will be the decider on that though. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



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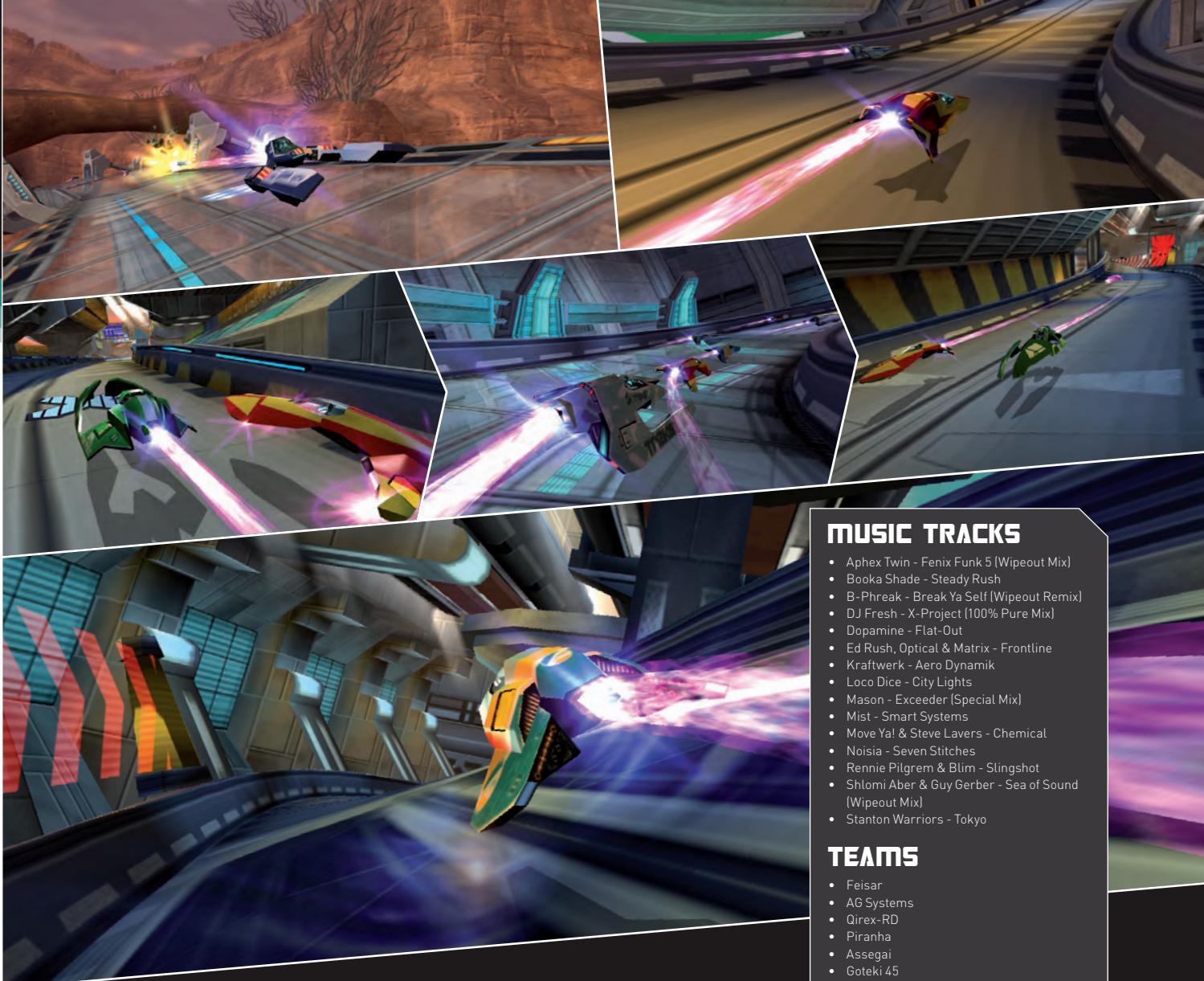
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WIPEOUT PULSE

IT'S ALWAYS A BEAUTIFUL change of pace, a real silver lining, in the day of a long-time game reviewer when a game comes along that you just know is going to be great no matter what. The *Wipeout* series has a long-standing ovation [since 1995, actually] for its vibrant and energetic take on futuristic anti-gravity racing, but the last few titles have been slightly flat. The exception to this came from *Wipeout Pure* on the PSP, possibly the last system fans expected the series to appear on. The results were not unpleasant and the PSP is a much more comfortable platform now than it was when it launched, so *Wipeout Pulse* being a PSP-exclusive doesn't seem to be the end of the world. There will be *Wipeout HD* for PlayStation 3 later anyway, which should keep the 'next-gen' chasers happy.

Pulse takes the already-refined systems from *Pure* [solid racing, good visuals] and blasts off, taking the experience further than ever before. Twelve all-new tracks, with forward and reverse routes ('black' and 'white' runs). The multiplayer now has the works: local ad hoc LAN, wireless online with Infrastructure Mode and you can even LAN with a wireless router. New teams to support, a new 'Mag-Strip' track

component that makes ships stick to certain parts of the track [now there are loops and 90-degree drops] and an all-new Photo mode that lets you stage screenshots and save them to the memory card. Downloadable content makes a return, and the campaign mode has been turned into a 'Grid' system where finishing one event unlocks events adjacent to it. A new Cannon gun replaces the Disruptor Bolt from *Pure* and all looks good with the return of Eliminator mode from *Wipeout 3* [been a while].

One of the more ingeniously implemented features is the skin customisation. The official Website will have a Flash-based page where players can log into their online accounts, create a skin for any ship using a slick interface [since it's not stuck on the PSP, you can use your mouse] and then you can download the skin into the game via the Internet [using Infrastructure Mode]. Very cool and exactly what *Wipeout* needs: a little player customization to make the online racing that little bit more terrific.

Pulse is a sure-fire success for fans of the series, and the demo we played confirms it in advance. **NAG**

Miktar "Feisar" Dracon



MUSIC TRACKS

- Aphex Twin - Fenix Funk 5 (Wipeout Mix)
- Booka Shade - Steady Rush
- B-Phreak - Break Ya Self (Wipeout Remix)
- DJ Fresh - X-Project (100% Pure Mix)
- Dopamine - Flat-Out
- Ed Rush, Optical & Matrix - Frontline
- Kraftwerk - Aero Dynamik
- Loco Dice - City Lights
- Mason - Exceeder (Special Mix)
- Mist - Smart Systems
- Move Ya! & Steve Lavers - Chemical
- Noisia - Seven Stitches
- Rennie Pilgrem & Blim - Slingshot
- Shlomi Aber & Guy Gerber - Sea of Sound (Wipeout Mix)
- Stanton Warriors - Tokyo

TEAMS

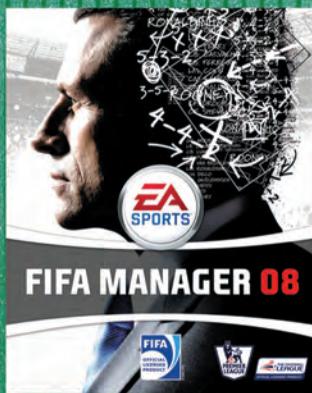
- Feisar
- AC Systems
- Qirex-RD
- Piranha
- Assegai
- Goteki 45
- Triakis
- EG-X (New team)
- Auricom (Downloadable shortly after release)
- Icaras (Downloadable shortly after release)
- Harimau (Downloadable shortly after release)
- Mirage (New team, downloadable shortly after release)

CIRCUITS

- Talon's Junction, set in an abandoned research park in Wales
- Moa Therma, on an island chain off the coast of Sicily
- Metropia, an urban circuit in New Kyoto
- Arc Prime, a circuit that runs around Seattle
- De Konstruct, in Geneva
- Tech De Ra, built upon the remains of a former hydroponics farm in Arizona
- The Amphesium, a purpose-built stadium-like circuit in Las Vegas, Nevada
- Fort Gale, set in a weather research station on Gibraltar
- Basilico, an abandoned city apparently in Nova Scotia
- Platinum Run, a circuit set in the park lands of a thawed and preserved Greenland
- Vertica, located in the Cayman Islands and similar to Moa Therma
- Outpost 7, a research and communications station but at the very top of the world in northern Finland



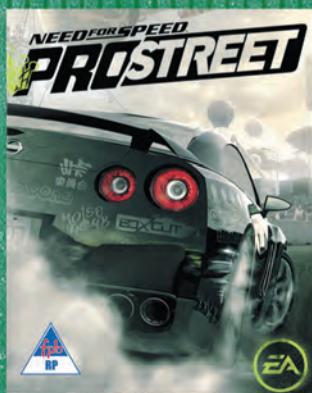
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UNCHARTED

DRAKE'S FORTUNE



DEEP IN THE DARK JUNGLE

NOTHING CUTS THROUGH THE MUNDANE QUALITIES OF EXISTENCE LIKE A GOOD ADVENTURE STORY. NOT ONE OF THOSE REAL-LIFE DRAMAS WHERE YOU LEARN HOW SOMEONE LOST SIX TOES CLIMBING MOUNT EVEREST. NO, WE ARE TALKING ABOUT LOOKING FOR THE HOLY GRAIL, UNCOVERING AN ANCIENT AND DANGEROUS ARTEFACT OR, IN THE CASE OF *UNCHARTED*, LOOKING FOR LOST TREASURE. NATHAN DRAKE BELIEVES HIMSELF TO BE A DESCENDENT OF SIR FRANCIS DRAKE, A NOTORIOUS PIRATE WHO MADE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR THE SPANISH IN SOUTH AMERICA DURING THE 1500S. WHEN HE FINDS DRAKE'S SECRET DIARY, IT SETS HIM AFTER THE TREASURE - THE GOLD OF EL DORADO. BUT THERE ARE PIRATES, GANGSTERS AND MORE IN HIS WAY. PLUS, LIKE WE ALL KNOW, THOSE ANCIENT TREASURES ARE NOT TO BE MEDDLED WITH...

WELCOME TO *UNCHARTED*, IN OUR OPINION ONE OF THE BEST GAMES OF THE YEAR. IT'S THE CREATION OF NAUGHTY DOG, THE DEVELOPER RENOWNED FOR ITS INCREDIBLE WORK IN THE JAK AND DAXTER GAMES. THIS FIRST-PARTY SONY DEVELOPER HAS LONG SHOWN ITS TALENT FOR MAKING PLAYSTATION HARDWARE WORK AS WELL AS DESIGNING HIGHLY PLAYABLE AND FUN GAMES. BUT *UNCHARTED* IS ARGUABLY THE PINNACLE OF ITS COLLECTION SO FAR.

CAPTURE THE MOMENT

For the first time Naughty Dog hired real stage and television actors for the cut-scenes in one of its games. The actors (Emily Rose as Elena, Nolan North as Nathan and Richard McGonagle as Sully, to name a few) played out the scenes on a stage, wearing the weird dotted suits and wielding brightly-coloured props around a non-existent environment. According to Nolan, he explained it to his seven-year-old son as sitting in a tree house and pretending it's a pirate fort. To keep the scenes real, dialogue wasn't recorded separately but instead on the stage while the actors were doing their thing. The man responsible for the talent, the talent director, is Gordon Hunt. His name might not ring a bell, but his resumé (excluding his long TV and movie career) speaks for itself, including games like *Legacy of Kane*, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* and *God of War 2*.

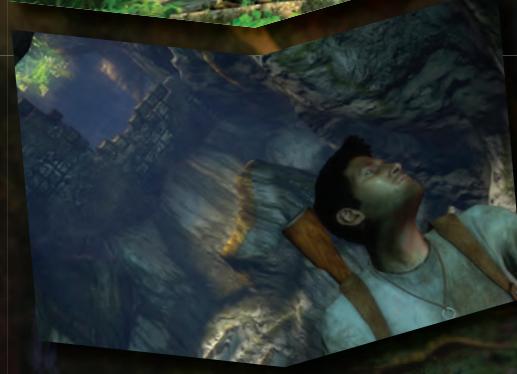
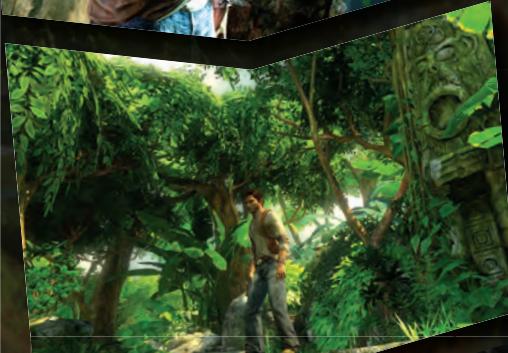
**SPINNING A YARN**

The inspiration for *Uncharted*'s feel and story comes straight from the serials that ran at American cinemas from the early 20th century to the late fifties. They were feature-length films designed and cut into 15-minute segments. These were shown at cinemas every week before or after a movie and the audience would come back to learn what happened next. The format was very popular and made household names out of characters like *The Phantom*, *The Lone Ranger* and *Flash Gordon*. Unfortunately the medium eventually died as it failed to evolve with the times. Today it's just a chapter of cinema history, but its legacy lives on. Films like *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* (both from George Lucas) celebrate a lot of elements from the films, especially the constant use of cliffhangers (the camera cutting away as Indiana starts running away from a boulder) and larger-than-life villains (like Darth Vader). *Uncharted* follows the same tradition. No, it doesn't play in 15-minute sections, but the script moves quickly, constantly throwing Nathan in seemingly impossible situations. Of course he makes it and survives - in serials the hero always does.



A HISTORY LESSON

When Naughty Dog decided on a story, they went for a well-known historical character with a lot of ambiguity around him. Though over here we don't know much about Francis Drake, he's a common topic in American school history books. Drake was employed by Queen Elizabeth to do a few things. One was circumnavigating the globe, but his main duties fell to the Caribbean area, where he fought against the Spanish navy. By the time he died, Drake had risen to vice-admiral and was second-in-command of the English fleet battling the Spanish. He was also a notorious privateer (pirate allied to a country), attacking Spanish supply ships, plus he dabbled in the other enriching careers of the time, such as slavery, politics and civil engineering. His reputation made him a thorn in the Spanish side, who called him *El Draque* (the dragon). Spain's King Philip apparently offered a reward equivalent to \$10 million today for Drake's head.



Jak and Daxter boasted around 60 to 80 facial poses per character. *Uncharted* steps well beyond that with 200 to 300 poses.

The characters in *Uncharted* use a joint structure that can emulate muscle mass. This makes characters look like their muscles are moving under their clothes.

Another massive leap between last and this generation has been more textures. *Uncharted* has ten times more facial textures than Naughty Dog's PS2 games - that amounts to roughly 20 to 30 textures per character. The textures are all hand-painted and photos weren't used.

Naturally there will be a big jump from the PlayStation 2 to PlayStation 3 in polygon count. *Uncharted*'s characters boast around 30 million polygons each.

ANIMATE THIS!

If there is one thing that makes *Uncharted* stand out, it's the animation. Naughty Dog's strength has always been in its animation and with *Uncharted* it set three goals: Realistic movement, so that the character has weight; fluidity, so that players don't get distracted by occasional stiffness; and responsiveness, otherwise Nathan would feel slow and difficult to control. This played a huge role in the production. Even though early builds of the game looked stunning, they were scrapped because the engineers and animators weren't happy with the gameplay. A lot of work went into making the characters feel flawed and human. Nathan stumbles across terrain, twists uncomfortably after making a long jump and flinches as bullets fly past him. His opponents are just as expressive, ducking and diving behind cover, constantly keeping players guessing where and how they will pop out to take a shot. **NAG**

REVIEWS

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III DEMO

It's finally here (well, the demo at least) and NAG's staff has been playing it at every chance possible. Since *UTIII* has practically dominated the office gaming scene (with the exception of *Team Fortress 2*), this month we decided to gather a few staff impressions of the *UTIII* demo:

REDTIDE

Attempting to cut his light workload even further, our esteemed Games Editor, Miktar, asked some NAG staff for the following: "Could you each please send me 80-word impressions of the *UTIII* demo – it doesn't have to be poetry, I'll hack and butcher it to make sure it's of the quality expected in our fine magazine." Eighty words aren't nearly enough to describe the coolness of *UTIII*, so in a system-bucking move I'm submitting two: BLOODY AWESOME!

MIKTAR

RedTide may not be editor anymore, but it seems he's managed to retain his uncanny ability to dodge doing actual work. Once again, it falls about the infallible Miktar to say it like it is, but not be half-arsed about it. Suffice to say, *Unreal Tournament III* is everything we were expecting and quite a bit more. The addition of the hover board sooths the "large map – takes forever to get anywhere if you don't have a vehicle" burns and the ability to 'latch on' to a moving vehicle for rapid towing transit is just plain awesome. The visuals are great, scale up and down well and the guns are nice and meaty. The understated interface speaks positively of what we can expect from the full game: a nice lean product, trimmed of fat and ready to fight.

SAVAGE JUNIOR

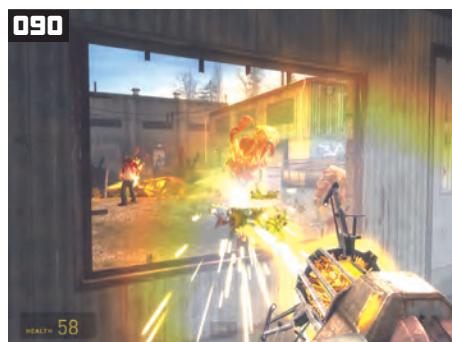
I like the game. It is very nice. I like to shoot things. I like it when I get in the vehicles and kill people in them, and I love blowing stuff up and stealing the flag and scoring. I think it rocks for multiplayer.

REEF

Being predominantly a *Battlefield* player, I have never really invested much time in the older *Unreal Tournament* games. So when the office loaded up the demo for some lunchtime gaming, I was kind of forced to play it. Initially the game controls and the character manoeuvrability felt sluggish, but once I mastered these, I could not put the game down. Not only is the game visually stunning, but the maps are very impressive and the game feels really well balanced. *UTIII* will definitely form part of my game library.

GUARDIEN

It's everything you've ever loved about the *UT* universe! The music is subtle yet epic, and takes you back to the very first time you embarked on the *UT* adventure. The visuals inspire a sense of wonderment and the CTF mode is as addictive as ever. It simply sauntered into our office and brazenly coveted the No. 1 spot for lunchtime CTF in our office. The *Quake III* icon on my desktop is not happy.



WEB SCORES

UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE [PS3]



NAG



METACRITIC

N/A

GAMERANKINGS

N/A

HELLGATE: LONDON [PC]



NAG



METACRITIC

72

GAMERANKINGS

74

ORANGE BOX [PC]



NAG



METACRITIC

96

GAMERANKINGS

96



100



090



098



104



088

REOTIDE'S REINDEER

Ho Ho Ho! Merry Christmas! We hope all you little boy gamers, girl gamers and undefined gender gamers have a Festive Season playing all the games we've reviewed this month. Let's meet the sled-pulling team!

James Francis

The reason one reindeer is in front is because it wants the most to not have to look at another reindeer's ass.

**Alex Jelagin**

When you're all the way at the back you don't have to pull as hard as the reindeer up front.

**Walt Pretorius**

Reindeer come in all shapes and sizes but look mostly uniform except for odd spots here and there.

**Adam Liebman**

Not much is known about this reindeer other than it is a reindeer.

**Tarryn van der Byl**

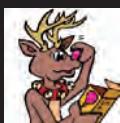
The only female reindeer on the team but proficient in all forms of reindeer martial arts.

**Miktar Dracon**

Not really a reindeer, just some guy in a reindeer suit pretending to be a reindeer.

**Toby Hudon**

Some reindeer let their manes grow out long, which makes them more attractive to the female reindeer.

**Justin Slabbert**

Also not really a reindeer, just a cardboard cutout held in place by the reins.

**Eddie Francis**

The reindeer your mother warned you about and prone to hunting in packs.

**Chris Bistline**

This reindeer practices magic and gives the other reindeer cancer with his mind.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 4 [360]



NAG

TWILIGHT PRINCESS [WII]



METACRITIC

90

GAMERANKINGS

86

NAG

92

METACRITIC

95

GAMERANKINGS

94

WORLD IN CONFLICT [PC]



NAG

79

METACRITIC

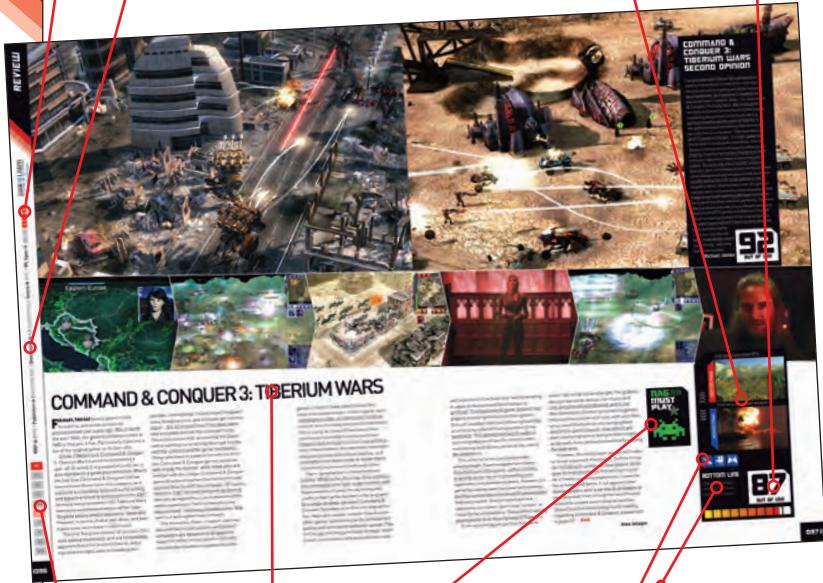
89

GAMERANKINGS

89

mmm... SHINY!

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section



PLATFORMS: The brightest block is the platform on which the game was reviewed. Dimmer blocks are platforms on which the game also appears. Simple.

GAME NAME: This is the important bit, and you might want to write it down somewhere just in case you need it later.

AWARDS: You won't find these NAG awards, given to games of merit, anywhere but in NAG. Truth.

ICONS: Check the list on the right for our frikkin' sweet icons, distilling the essence of games even further, just for you.

BOTTOM LINE: It all comes down to this, and the words written here will shape the future, moulding it towards gaming excellence.

DISTRIBUTOR LIST

For your convenience, the numbers of the distribution companies

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If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like, while giving us less work to do in the review. Everyone wins, so best memorise this list below and look out for them in the Review score box.



ACTION: When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.



BABYSITTING: Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.



BITCHIN': When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.



BORING: Grab your blankie and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.



BUGGY: Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.



CASH-IN/LICENSE: Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.



CINEMATIC: Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.



CLONE: We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.



COMPETITIVE: You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.



FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? Careful, it might be Foreign!



ONLINE: For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.



PARTY: Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.



PIECE OF POO: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.



STUPID PEOPLE: Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.



ALL AGES: These games contain no violence, immoral acts or anything that might narrow the demographic, but they may still be diffi cult.



KID FRIENDLY: Kids can play this game without needing an adult every five minutes to explain to them what button to press.



16+ RESTRICTION: If you're 16 or over, you are well within your rights to play this game.



18+ RESTRICTION: If you are not yet 18, please put down this game and back away slowly before the police come and arrest you.



MULTIPLAYER: The number on the contoller icon indicates the maximum number of people who can play at the same time.

WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

5 Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**

4 Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**

3 Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 chucks happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**

2 Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**

1 You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**

SIGNAL LOST

S.O.S.

S.O.S.

S.O.S.

S.O.S.

S.O.S.

S.O.S.

S.O.S.

"DILEMMA" DOESN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE IT.



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Jump in.



Palm tree – This can be shot anywhere along the trunk and it'll break off there. It's possible to squash enemies with falling trees [and yourself if you're not careful].

Lamps, bridges and signs – this kind of setup won't be repeated anywhere else in the game and highlights some of the tremendous attention to detail everywhere in the game world.

Island backdrop – There really isn't any better location for a shooter than a tropical island. It feels just like you're on holiday, especially when the whole island looks and feels as real as real life.

Nanosuit – You can see by the red colour [and the fist icon bottom right] that the nanosuit is in maximum strength mode.

Weapon – This is one of the staple weapons early in the game. Pressing 'C' will bring up the weapon menu where you can change your scope, type of ammunition, etc.

In this jungle – You'll find tortoises, birds, frogs, fish, sharks, butterflies and the more you look the more you'll see. Just don't wander off too far or you'll get eaten...

Map, compass and alert indicator – Much like *Metal Gear Solid*, *Crysis* has a large stealth element to the game dynamic. Put your suit's cloak mode on and you can move around freely (but not for too long). Once your energy bar hits zero and you're no longer cloaked, you need to duck for cover because if the enemy see or hear you they will alert their mates, making life that much more complicated. This small map also shows your objectives and which way you're facing.

Ammunition, health and suit energy and mode – all the essential information can be found here. *Crysis* has a rather small and concise system to summarise all the important bits of information, (perhaps a little too small and concise for some)



CRYYSIS

BEFORE WE BEGIN, LET'S get the vitally important stuff out of the way and answer the two questions everyone keeps asking. Yes, you can pick up a chicken and kill someone with it and yes, some of the trees will fall down when you shoot them [similar to the movie *Predator* but not as cool]. Now that these two burning issues have been dealt with we can take a look at why *Crysis* is setting the new benchmark for shooters, and surprisingly it's not just because it's lovely to look at, has aliens in it [only a spoiler if you're an idiot] and you get to wear a spiffy nanosuit.

AWESOME SUIT DUDE!

There's just so much hype, speculation

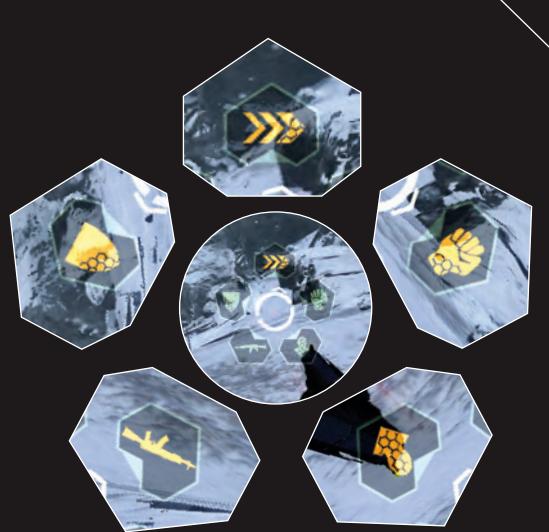
and anticipation around this game that it's hard to know exactly what to talk about and what not to talk about. The dilemma is made that much more complicated and difficult because the game is really exceptionally good, the kind of good that's going to make reviews everywhere sound like corporate sell-outs. So, where to start and what to talk about. You could talk about how really great the story is and how through some very simple and effective techniques just playing the game from start to end adds more to the story than the actual story parts do. You can also talk about how there's a lot going on in *Crysis*, starting with North Korea and the USA,

archaeology, aliens, marines, hostages and a nanosuit and ending with driving trucks, zero gravity, nuclear explosions, frozen wastelands and chicken tossing. Somehow this fast-moving action adventure manages to keep up with an equally fast-paced story that all combines to give the player a hell of a ride that doesn't run out of steam and keeps you guessing by keeping one step ahead all the time. You're never quite sure what's going to happen next. One minute you risk freezing to death if you stand still too long on a map aptly named, Paradise Lost, and the next you're on the back of the jeep manning a machine gun, hurtling down a mountain road while



shooting weird *Matrix* inspired aliens. The story here is much like the graphics. It's not that there's anything exceptionally inventive going on but it's rather the overall execution and personality that elevate the whole experience. That said, the game is breathtakingly beautiful. Stand back from a screen and you'd be forgiven for thinking you're watching a movie. The real genius, however, isn't in the way the sunlight shines through the jungle canopy or the highly detailed tree trunks, the genius is all in the design – the way everything has been put together. You won't find a similar-looking section of beach or a familiar part of tropical jungle or a cut-and-paste

tin shed anywhere – it all looks real and feels real and in some sections you'll find yourself noting landmarks in case you get turned around in a firefight. Sometimes it's important to remember if you're headed upstream or downstream. You see, in *Crysis*, it's entirely possible to get a little lost in the game world, both literally and figuratively. The combination of a stunning looking world and an original design all work together to make you believe you're there in the world. The island that *Crysis* plays out on feels like a living, breathing entity. It's so good to see a developer not relying on a new graphics engine alone to deliver a game and actually spending some



NANOSUIT AND...

The introductory movie at the start of the game does a good job at explaining how some of the nanosuit technology works. The suit has four different modes and a supply of energy. Depending on the mode and what your level of activity is, this energy is depleted and subsequently replenished when you're not using your suit. The nanosuit and energy ecosystem are perfectly balanced and for every plus there's a minus, lit wouldn't be very sporting if you were cloaked all the time. To access all the wonders of the nanosuit players must press down their middle mouse button [or designated binding] and a radial menu appears in the centre of the screen. While holding down the button, move the mouse in the direction of the desired suit mode. It's so quick and easy to use you'll find yourself wondering why they don't do this more often in games.

CLOAK

This really speaks for itself, like in *Harry Potter* except this one doesn't smell like wet dog. You can access this mode anytime rendering you invisible to your enemies but it doesn't last forever. That said, get too close to an enemy soldier, on high alert and he will notice something weird about the space you're occupying while cloaked. He might even fire off a few experimental rounds in your direction. The other catch is that you cannot shoot while cloaked. Firing any weapon or throwing a grenade reduces your suit's energy level to zero, which defaults the suit mode to armour, which is good because...

ARMOUR

Armour mode is protection and in this mode the suit acts as a buffer between enemy bullets and shrapnel and your health bar. Fortunately, if you come out of cloaked mode abruptly, the suit always defaults to this mode and helps keep you alive for a few seconds longer. Warning: not as effective as you might think.

STRENGTH

Strength mode is interesting because it opens up the sandbox aspect of playing *Crysis* more than anything else in the game. With strength you can leap higher, take apart buildings and anything you pick up becomes a lethal weapon. Interestingly, you throw grenades much farther in strength mode and if you were to throw a chicken at someone in this mode, they die. Depending on your style of play you'll either use this mode a lot or the cloak mode.

SPEED

In this mode you can move very quickly for short snatches of time. If you're really quick you can combine a short burst of speed with a powered jump for surprise attacks or getting over that tricky gap in the road.

WEAPON

The final option on the radial menu is the weapon mode. This isn't really a suit function but rather a mode you enter to adjust your weapon. You can change things here such as type of sights, ammunition (normal or incendiary) or even add a silencer. There are also tactical options such as a dart setting to put someone to sleep or in extreme cases a grenade launcher. All of these tweaking options go a long way to make up for not being able to carry all the weapons in the game.



Does this make me look fat?



time making the game world as immersive as possible.

THE EXPERIENCE

Stealth is important in *Crysis*. So important that you have access to a cloaking nanosuit, silenced weapons and darts that knock enemies out for a short time. Let's say there's an outpost that you need to neutralise and gather intelligence from. There's a road running right down the middle of the complex with jungle on both sides you have a jeep with a mounted machine gun. The original plan is to rush the location, drive right through it, stop just outside, turn the machine gun around and then kill anything that comes running your way. Great idea until you spot their machine gun turrets... a little too late. This method also raises the alarm and before long more enemy soldiers arrive in their own jeeps with their own machine guns, in a few extreme cases they might also call for a helicopter gunship. That's one way of skinning the cat. The other is to avoid the road and approach from the jungle, cloaked and then move from tree to tree while the suit recharges. Using the



nanosuit like this will get you right into the enemy camp where you can watch their patrol patterns. Now you can sneak around until you have a perfect shot with a silenced rifle. It's possible the best way to eliminate very large groups of enemies one by one until the objective is clear. This is a typical *Crysis* scenario, but that said, as you play and as you get further into the game, things do change and sometimes it's easier just to switch to full automatic and let rip. Just a note on the artificial intelligence: if you mess up you can always run away and hide until they 'forget' about you; the only real penalty if you get caught is usually more enemies to kill. It would have been nice [but probably impossible to play] if the knowledge of your presence in the game world was persistent.

MAXIMUM GAME

What's wrong with it? Well, if the artificial intelligence was a little better, then *Crysis* might just have been the perfect game. Just to qualify that, the human enemies are smart (scary smart) but the aliens are disappointingly dumb, often ignoring your presence or simply

getting stuck behind a rock. They'll do in a pinch but you'd expect a species capable of space travel to be able to navigate around a few rocks. There are also some minor key binding issues that a patch will eventually fix and the game has a few quirky bugs here and there; some clipping problems and dead bodies that move around sometimes (this wasn't appreciated after a particularly tense battle). It's really a whole pile of small things but nothing that prevents the enjoyment of the game, because everything else is so polished and slick that these minor errors seem exaggerated. But this is just being fussy for the sake of it...

Crysis is the next step forward in first-person shooter thinking. It's not because the game engine looks great or the nanosuit works well or you can kill with a single chicken. The true success story here is that the developers have taken all the latest technology available and have made a great gaming experience. This isn't something you can afford to miss because games like this don't come along very often.

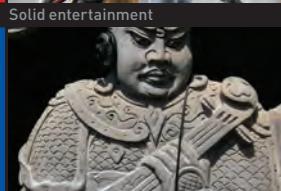
NAG

Michael James

Half-Life 2



AS GOOD AS



Solid entertainment

FOR FANS OF

94
OUT OF 100

BOTTOM LINE

Highly recommended. It's every bit the game you've been waiting for and still surprises and exceeds expectations as it plays out.



VALVE HEARTS BROADBAND

There is one catch to getting *Orange Box* - it requires an Internet connection to authenticate. Fortunately the extra updates it downloads aren't big or spectacular, but the game will not work if it's not activated online. You don't need to be online when you want to play, since Steam has an offline setting, but after installing *Orange Box* you'll need to log onto the service to show you didn't steal the game. Why? Because as far as companies like Valve is concerned, everyone has broadband. Hurray for narrow-minded First World idiots.

**THE HUNTER IN ME, THE HUNTER IN YOU**

Briefly glimpsed in a recorded video back in *Episode One*, the Hunter synth has been deployed for active duty in this sequel. This eight-foot mechanical fiend, whose lumbering gait resembles nothing so much as the product of a monstrous union between an orangutan and a camel, is aggressive, intelligent, fast, and really, really deadly. Take it down with the AR-2 Pulse Rifle's alt-fire (a one-shot kill), or a Gravity Gun loaded with one of those nifty Magnusson Devices (you'll have to wait a bit for those, though). Once they start moving in packs, you're pretty much screwed.

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO

TROUBLE SEEMS TO CLING to Gordon Freeman like an undomesticated headcrab. It's probably because he's a ginger. Preexisting genetic liabilities notwithstanding, he and his relentlessly cheerful chum, Alyx Vance have eluded the insidious grasp of the Combine for the time being, although they've managed to write off a freight train in the process. Remember that train they spent the entirety of *Episode One* trying to reach? Well, they've broken it. Freeman certainly likes to do it in style.

Anyway, they're now left with no option but to slog it on foot to the rebel bolthole, an abandoned missile installation called White Forest. As you might recall, Alyx previously intercepted and leeched an outgoing transmission packet just before the Citadel fell over and died, supposedly containing some sort of critically important information about the Combine homeworld and – perhaps somewhat more urgently - the gargantuan superportal now looming portentously over the smoking remains of City 17. Apparently in spiteful retaliation for this insolence, the Combine have liberally deposited their rather unpleasant Advisors around the region. *Quid pro quo*, as the admonition goes, although the Combine would probably say it in some other weird alien language.

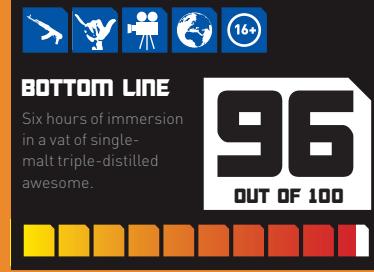
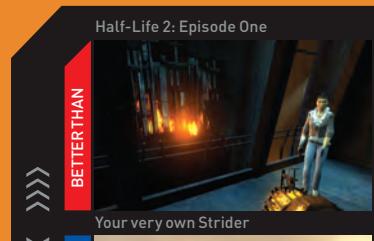
Suffice it to say that the trip to White Forest is not uneventful.

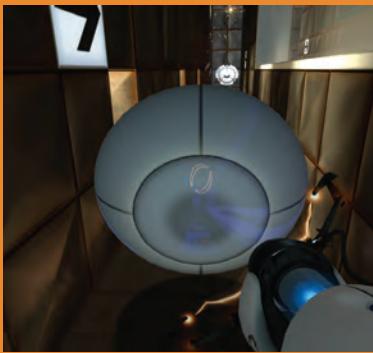
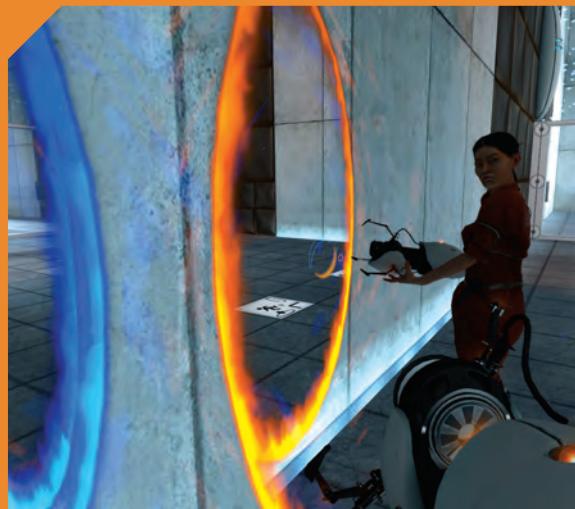
The latest addition to the *Half-Life* myth was developed using a significantly enhanced version of the Source Engine. Determined to outclass its predecessor's inclusion of HDR lighting effects, *Episode Two* touts a brand-new particle system, dynamic lighting and shadowing, longer draw distances, motion blur, and a large-scale Destruct-O-Rig cinematic physics system that looks really expensive. The upshot of all this is that – hot damn! – this game looks sexy. And there's at least one moment during the course of the game that all this marvellous technology will find you rather weak at the knees. Gravity, mass, concrete and buckling girders are involved.

Relentlessly paced from its opening sequence through to the stupefyingly humongous conclusion (we've really never seen anything quite like it), *Episode Two* sees Gordon scrambling desperately from one insurance clause to another with barely a minute's pause for thought or smammiches. By our reckoning, the wretched man hasn't eaten in at least two days. How does he do it?

Seriously, though, just go and buy this already. **NAG**

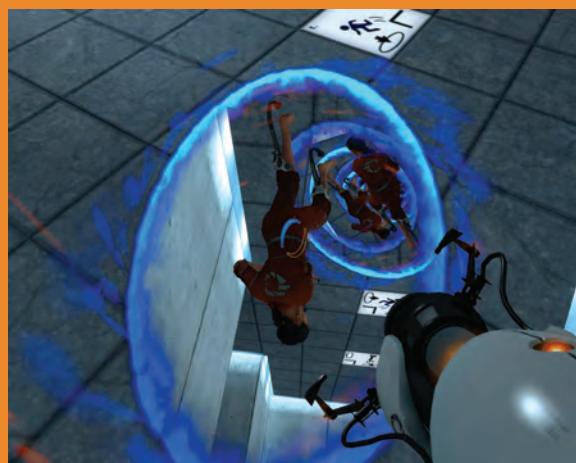
Tarryn "I wanna be an Advisor" van der Byl





MEANWHILE, OVER ON THE OTHER SIDE

Once you've portaled your way to your complimentary victory cake, you can replay the game with a developer commentary. While this might seem like a superfluous addition to the game, it's definitely worth a listen. With contributions from developers Kim Swift, Bay Rait and Robin Walker, and even the voice of GLaDOS herself, Ellen McLain, this commentary discloses all sorts of intriguing behind-the-scenes information – including the shortcut through Room 5 that we shamefully failed to notice. Our favourite bit? "We think we're just at the beginning of taking advantage of this kind of gameplay," says Valve kingpin Gabe Newell.



PORTAL

THERE IS AN UNSPOKEN law in the gaming universe that states simply: any videogame that sings to you during its menu screen or the credits sequence is automatically pure unadulterated awesome. So far, the law has held true and *Portal* is a game that not only adheres to said law but practically redefines it in its own image.

Portal is Valve's incubation project by the team that released the indie favourite *Narbacular Drop*, which features similar gameplay elements. Unlike initial expectations, *Portal* is not a glorified puzzle game where you must use a gun that can create a set of linked portals on specific surfaces to traverse and solve tricky situations. It is, in fact, a strong narrative that takes the player through a genuinely creepy situation that actually ties in beautifully with the *Half-Life* universe (as is discovered about 75% of the way through Episode 2).

The player awakes as a test subject in the Aperture Science facility - a competitor to Black Mesa - where ongoing research into portal technology is hoping to compete with Black Mesa. But things have gone terribly wrong and continue to go in that general direction, as the research facility operation system AI, GLaDOS, goes a little bit insane.

As the stunning Commentary mode reveals (unlocked for a level after that level is completed), the campaign of *Portal* is an

extended tutorial on how to use the portal gun, told through strong narrative and superbly dark, humorous writing. It has been a very, very long time since a game has contained so much quality black humour.

The campaign appears short but is actually shaved down to lean perfection, free of the bloat and fat that could easily tarnish its shine. Once the campaign is done, two additional mission packs are unlocked that contain what could only be the original idea of *Portal* - a series of puzzles that will require you to stand on your head to solve. Challenging and difficult but clever in their execution, the mission packs contain the real challenge of *Portal*, which leaves the campaign free to keep things moderately easy to help newcomers enjoy the game, while advanced players will no doubt find ingenious ways of finishing levels that the developers never imagined.

As with the entire *Orange Box*, *Portal* has its own set of "Achievements" that require you to fulfil certain requirements or objectives to unlock the bragging rights of having the Achievement on your Steam ID page. These Achievements obviously add longevity, if you enjoy that sort of thing, and the Achievements themselves are actually quite well designed.

If the goal of *Portal* was to present something new, different and interesting to a market that lives off the familiar, it has

succeeded with flying colours. Bravo, Valve and the team previously known as Nuclear Monkey Software. Bravo. **NAG**

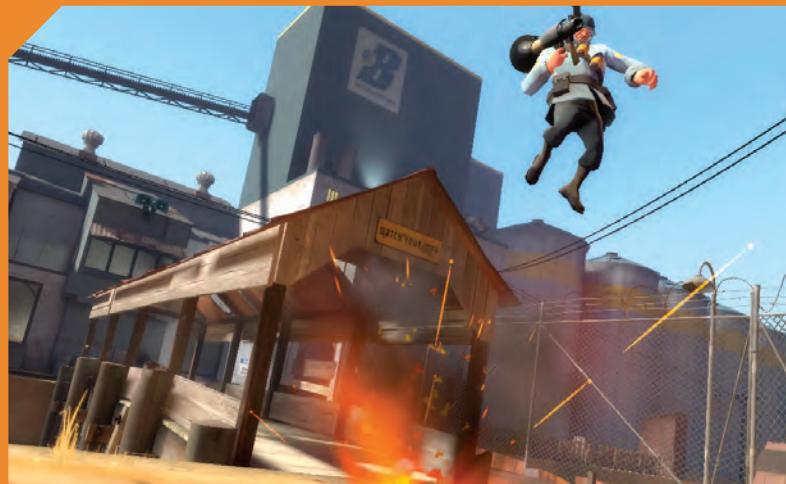


As good as it Gets
AS GOOD AS ROTFL
FOR FANS OF

BOTTOM LINE

The single most spectacularly interesting thing to hit gaming since the Orz from Star Control.





TEAM FORTRESS 2

WHEN I LOOK BACK at 1997, I have fond memories of ditching my university classes to play *Team Fortress* for hours and hours. I'm pretty sure that in another ten years I'll look back and have fond memories of putting off my game reviews to play *Team Fortress* 2 for hours and hours. This is the kind of game experience that comes roughly once a decade - and it's worth the wait.

The original Quake-based *Team Fortress* will always have a special place in my heart. It's arguably the first proper multiplayer game I ever played. Back in the mid '90s, multiplayer games were still fussy, difficult prospects that involved either getting on a LAN of some sort, or some arcane trickery to get it to work over a modem. For me, the path went from LAN games of *Doom* to *Descent*, to online games of *Command & Conquer* using Kali, a sort of LAN emulator that let games that only supported LAN play work over the Internet. I could easily spend up to 12 hours a day playing with friends I made online back then. However, with the release of *Red Alert*, *C&C*'s popularity began to wane. Several friends of mine shared my low opinion of its successor, so we started looking for other games to play together. The game we eventually found was *Team Fortress*.

You might ask, "Why should I be bothered about which games this guy played from 1994 to 1999?" Well, the reason is that *Team Fortress* was a game I would miss

school, meals, and sleep for. It remains the only game I have ever joined a Clan for. So, for the sequel to be anything other than a huge disappointment would seem like an impossible task, because my memories of the game are significantly larger than life, and coloured bright with the passage of time. Well, I am anything but disappointed. That should tell you something.

The point is, anyone can write a review that describes the *TF* classes to you, how the different types of maps work, or debate the merit of the removal of grenades from the previous versions or the 'cartoonish' graphical style. You probably even read that in last month's *NAG*. However, what would that actually convey to you, the reader? That it's a bit of an odd game with a few different things. That's not what I want to say. What I'd rather say is that this game, under the right circumstances, can deliver an experience that transcends anything you're likely to play for a long time to come.

As I write this, all the local servers are too busy for me to join - and that on a Monday afternoon! (Which is probably the only reason this review was even done.) I know dedicated MMO players and entire groups that have stopped their regular gaming nights to switch over to *TF2*. Nevertheless, this isn't the kind of game you need friends for to play. It's the kind of game that makes friends of whoever you play with. To miss out on it would be a

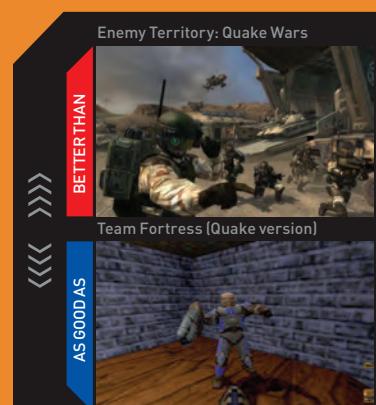
ENGINEERED IN SECRET

First announced around Half-Life's release back in 1998 (forever ago, in terms of game development), Team Fortress 2's interminably protracted production cycle saw it featured regularly on vaporware lists, including Wired annual names of shame. The game was originally planned to be a free Quake mod, but smelling potential, Valve recruited the development team and promoted the project to a standalone retail release. At E3 the following year, the game was demonstrated, now dangling a subtitle - Brotherhood of Arms. Thereafter, the game simply winked out of all known existence until July 2006, when it was unveiled at the EA Summer Showcase.



tragedy you cannot comprehend. Please come play it with us. **NAG**

Toby Hudon



BOTTOM LINE

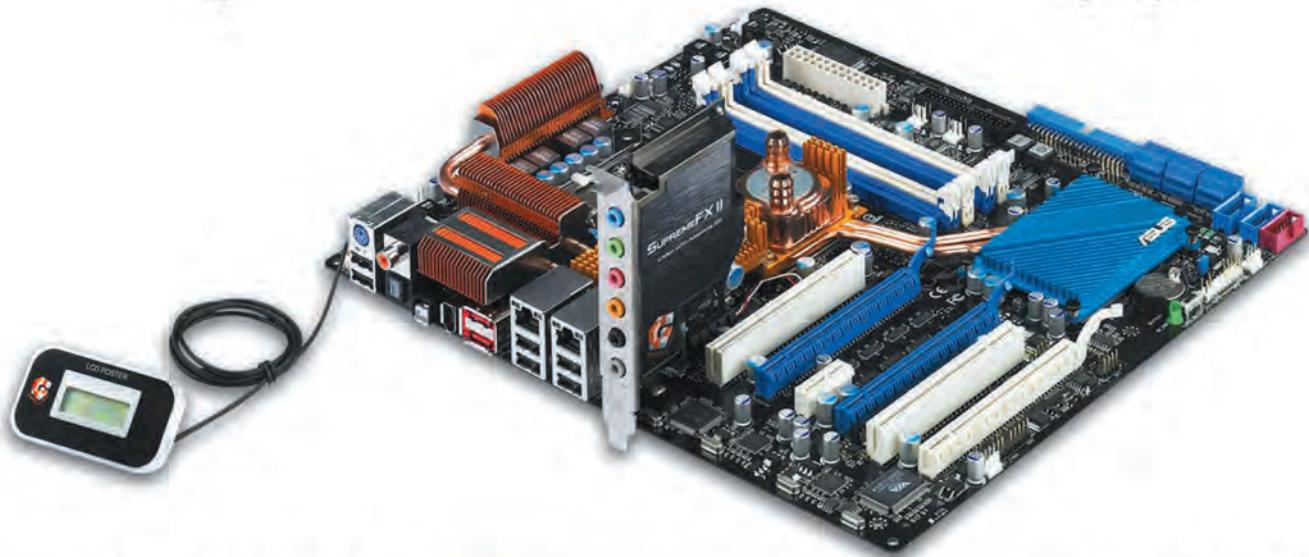
It's the antithesis of Counter-Strike. It's cooperative, unrealistic, and fun.

96
OUT OF 100



ASUS ROG Maximus Series

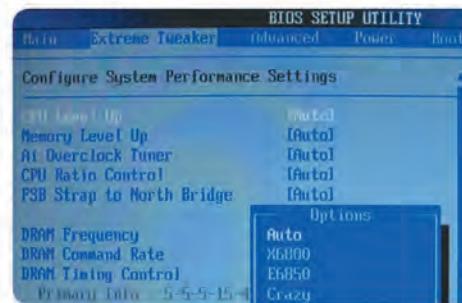
A Simple click for instant upgrade



With upcoming games and applications looking so good, you can't afford to slack behind. You need a motherboard that is able to deliver extreme overclocking to stay on the top, and the ASUS ROG Maximus Extreme / Formula Series of motherboards looks set to provide you with all this, and more. Supporting Intel®'s X38 Express Chipset - the latest chipset to support next generation 45nm CPUs in high-end desktop platforms, this powerful series of motherboards is able to allow you to overclock with ease, and provides a unique CPU enhancing technology - CPU Level Up, that instantly boosts CPU speeds without extra costs!

Overclocking Made Easy with CPU Level Up

This ASUS ROG motherboard series allows flexible and cost-free CPU upgrading with the exclusive CPU Level Up. This feature allows you to easily upgrade CPU performances without prior overclocking knowledge. Simply pick the processor speed you want in the user-friendly interface, and the motherboard will do the rest - overclocking has never been easier! This instinctive and user-friendly overclocking method saves you precious money and provides instant performance upgrades, and what's more, overclocking enthusiasts can also make use of the CPU Level Up result to adjust settings for even higher frequencies.



▲ User-friendly interface for easy overclocking

Cutting-Edge Fusion Block System for Thermal Performance

Taking the ASUS ROG's renowned heatpipe design a step further, the Fusion Block System utilizes a pin-fin heatsink design that combines the ASUS ROG's renowned heatpipe design with the additional ability to connect to a water cooling system. By taking the entire integrated solution into design considerations, you will enjoy exceptional thermal performance to the north bridge,



▲ Fusion Block System provides outstanding cooling

south bridge, Crosslinx, and even VRM with a single connection - gaining a versatile, efficient, and advanced thermal system for better overclocking results.

Extreme Graphical Performance with Crosslinx

The ASUS ROG believes in unsurpassed graphical performance and achieving the best gaming potentials. The ASUS ROG Maximus Extreme allows gamers to reach this level with its multiple GPU support and Crosslinx technology that features a dedicated graphics controller to optimize PCIe allocation with dual x8 lanes - providing x16, x8, x8 PCIe allocation with its Triple-Crossfire setting. This balances the GPU speeds with all the PCIe lanes coming from the north bridge without DMI bottlenecks - a problem faced by other's x16 x16 x4 lanes. This dual x8 PCIe lane technology balances GPU speeds and is the key in setting higher 3DMark world records and providing smoother gameplay with higher frame rates for the ultimate gaming experience.



▲ ASUS Crosslinx balances GPU speeds for faster graphics



The Botany Award Show got ugly



UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

I'M A SUCKER FOR adventures in jungles. This is likely a result of my upbringing, a time when I was exposed to movies like *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, games like *Monkey Island* and daily television fodder like the *The Mysterious Cities of Gold*. That has left me vulnerable for any story that takes place in the jungle and has something to do with ancient ruins and some kind of dangerous artifact. So, just to make the point clear, I'm a sucker for adventures in jungle. And I am completely besotted with *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*.

But let's put this in perspective. This wasn't the case before I played the game. It just looked boring to me. I'm also far from a PlayStation 3 evangelist. So all of what follows is not hype speaking. This is one incredible game.

Wait a minute - am I being entirely fair? I love the setting and the concept behind *Uncharted*, so naturally I'll be a bit biased, right? But yeah, I'm being entirely fair. This is a great game. This is one of the greatest games made in the past few years. This is, in my not-so-humble opinion, the best game of the year. That isn't cut and dry - there are things that you might not like about *Uncharted*. For example, if you don't play games purely designed as a single-player

experience, you won't like it. Then again, you are stupid. For one second, stop acting like co-op is the be-all of gaming, especially since for the years before *Gears of War* people like me have been moaning at the severe lack of co-op in games. If a game NEEDS co-op to be good, it's also slightly mediocre (*Gears of War*, incidentally, does not need co-op to give you a great experience). For one more second, stop proclaiming that a game must have multiplayer to be of any use to anyone. For just one moment, consider that what makes a lot of games awesome is the reason why you play them. In the case of *Uncharted*, you play it for the journey, the story and the really, really kick-ass cinematic scenes.

Why is *Uncharted* such a thing of beauty? Why is this a game that everyone should buy and play? For starters, it oozes quality - the kind that only seems to happen on the PS3 when Sony sinks a lot of money into a first- or second-party project. I have no doubt *Uncharted* has a scary price tag to it. Naughty Dog, the highly-skilled team behind *Jak & Daxter*, once again shows its ability to create incredible animations. It's not simply a matter of motion-capturing things and fine-tuning them by hand. The little touches make it count - protagonist Nathan Drake flinches as bullets hit the cover he hides behind; the

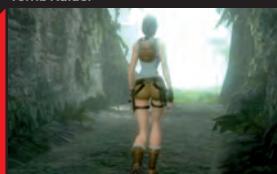
**NAG >>>
EDITOR'S
CHOICE**



Gears of War



Tomb Raider



BETTER THAN



BOTTOM LINE

Buy a PlayStation 3



NAUGHTY DOG

Founded in 1986 by Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin, developer Naughty Dog has been a part of Sony since being acquired in 2001. Gavin is known for his background in LISP programming from his MIT days in the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. His father was a corporate lawyer and his mother a painter. Gavin met Rubin at Hebrew school and together they published their first game, *Ski Crazed*, for the Apple II in 1985.

Gavin and Rubin went on to produce a sequence of progressively successful games. Upon advice from Mark Cerny, producer of *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, Naughty Dog focused its new resources on creating a character-based platform game. This led to *Crash Bandicoot* for the PlayStation, released in 1996. After three *Crash* titles, Sony acquired Naughty Dog as a new first-party developer in 2001.

After the fourth *Crash* title (*Crash Team Racing*), the team started work on *Jak & Daxter* for the PlayStation 2. The series was largely written in Gavin's custom LISP dialect.

In 2004, co-founder and Naughty Dog president, Jason Rubin, left the company to work on a new project named *Iron and the Maiden*. A creator-owned comic book from Rubin, the

pencils are being done by *Witchblade* artist Francis Manapul with backgrounds by Joel Gomez. The four issue miniseries portrays an alternate-universe 1930s metropolis, struggling to survive a three-way battle for power between The Government, The Order and The Syndicate.

In 2003, a member of Naughty Dog left to form Ready At Dawn with various former members of Blizzard Entertainment, their first project, *Daxter* for the PlayStation Portable.

SEGA GENESIS

Rings of Power (1991)

PLAYSTATION

Crash Bandicoot (1996)

Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back (1997)

Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped (1998)

Crash Team Racing (1999)

PLAYSTATION 2

Jack and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy (2001)

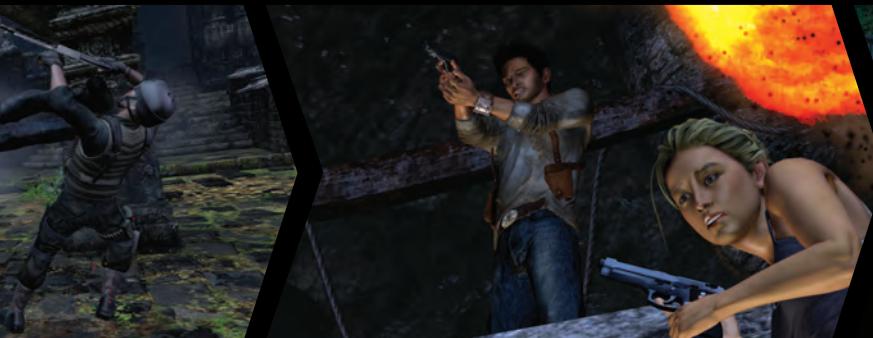
Jak II (Renegade) (2003)

Jak 3 (2004)

Jak X: Combat Racing (2005)

PLAYSTATION 3

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune (2007)



enemy duck, dive and try to outsmart your careful aiming; the in-engine cut-scenes have the most articulate and expressive digital actors I have ever seen in any game. The art direction also didn't hold back with lush levels, deep and vibrant colours and environments that ooze the romantics of period adventure pieces like *Indiana Jones*.

On top of that, the controls will rock you. *Uncharted* mixes two types of games - *Gears of War* and *POP: Sands of Time*. There is plenty of action to be had, ducking and diving from cover to cover as you make a few pirates, mercenaries and other things regret their career options. In between, Nathan will scale some scary heights, jumping at ledges, onto ropes and over perilous gaps. In terms of combat, *Uncharted* rivals anything in its genre, including the mighty *GOW*, and as a platformer it drops right into the *POP* and *Tomb Raider* party. It is always obvious when a game has seen heinous amounts of quality control - *Uncharted*'s QC must have seemed perverted.

Finally there are the great cut-scenes, which are a good reason to play the game. Now this statement might remind you of another PS3 heavy weight, *Heavenly Sword*. Here we come to a point of irony: *Uncharted* is about as long as *Heavenly Sword*, but while *HS* was criticised heavily for this, it fits *Uncharted* like a glove. If you can

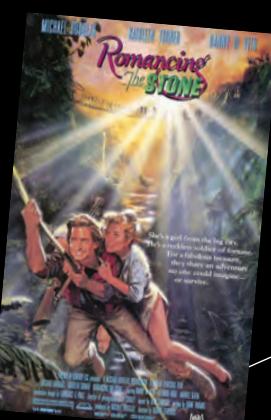
think back to the potency *Max Payne*'s own ten hours carried, you are on the money with *Uncharted*. If not, suffice to say that complaining about its length is a slap in *Uncharted*'s face and a crime to gaming in general. Once you play it, you'll see what I mean. Sure, it's never enough, but when can you ever get enough of a good thing? Back to those cut-scenes - the characters are all cliché, but they are well-designed (and kudos to a very natural and un-exaggerated female lead) and the script telling the story is simply excellent. If an *Uncharted* movie was made using the game engine, I'd pay to own it. This sets a new benchmark in games, because I don't think it has ever been done this well. There are better CG cut-scenes in the biz, but *Uncharted* just takes it to a whole different level. Sure, it doesn't take puzzles or combat to the challenging levels of other contemporaries, but the overall package beats all of them.

Uncharted is why big-budget games exist. I would put in a small disclaimer here, saying that if you only want co-op or something like that, don't play this game. But in all honesty, you should. And if you don't like it, please stop playing games. If all PS3 games were like this, the console would rule the world. Alas, these only come along every few years. **NAG**

James Francis

UNCHARTED'S STONES

We'll just go out on a limb here and guess that one of *Uncharted*'s big inspirations was the 1984 movie *Romancing The Stone*. They are worlds apart story-wise, but the movie told the tale of a jungle adventurer (Michael Douglas) who teams up with a neurotic writer (Kathleen Turner) to save her sister and also find a precious ancient jewel hidden in the Amazon. *Uncharted*'s script and cut-scenes have the same chemistry between the characters and we can't help but see Douglas's character in the damned-if-I-don't attitude of Nathan Drake.





RATCHET & CLANK: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION

NAG: Right here, right now, for your very entertainment fulfilment, ladies and gentlemen... the indomitable, inseparable (except when the mission requires it) duo of Ratchet and Clank! Thank you both for being here.

Ratchet: Hey, it's cool. We dig doing this kind of stuff, don't we Clank?

Clank: I'm not adverse to a little limelight. Thank you for having us, and it's wonderful to be here.

NAG: So, tell us about *Tools of Destruction*. It's your sixth game (not counting the mobile stuff) and your first foray on the PlayStation 3. How does it feel to finally be next-gen?

Ratchet: I think it suits us! Sure, we had some great times on the PlayStation 2, but it was time to step things up a notch and really show the fans what we can do. I'm especially fond of *ToD* because it finally unveils more about my past, what happened to the rest of the Lombax race and Clank even discovers he has a soul (or at least, that's what his imaginary friends tell him).

Clank: They are not imaginary. The Zoni are a

race of robots that only I can see, and they bestow on me fabulous powers such as the ability to fly and shoot a geothermal laser from my head.

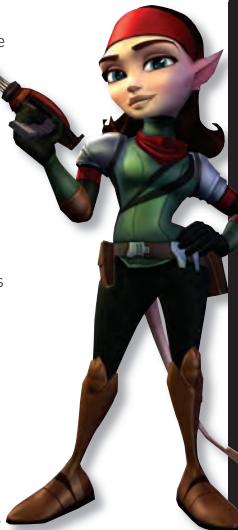
Ratchet: Sure... Anyway, after *Deadlocked*, we felt it was time to get back to some good old-fashioned platforming and so that's what we've done. We think fans will be happy to see us go back to our roots.

Clank: I feel I should mention that, while we have certainly managed to recapture some of the original spirit of the series, *ToD* does neglect a few of the things that made *Up Your Arsenal* so memorable, such as Quark's quirky 2D side-scrolling platformer sections.

Ratchet: Oh, c'mon Clank - as if Quark needs any more attention. You're just sour because you didn't get that much game time in *ToD*.

Clank: I am not, but only because I got to star solo in my own upcoming PSP title, *Secret Agent Clank*.

Ratchet: Show-off. Y'know, working with the PlayStation 3 has been great, but we didn't let it go to our heads (although we do wish we didn't have so much SIXAXIS stuff in there).



INSOMNIAC GAMES

Independent developer Insomniac Games was founded in 1994 and has managed to release a slew of award-winning hits over the last 13 years. Their unique properties, *Spyro*, *Disruptor* and *Ratchet & Clank* have managed to sell over 25 million copies worldwide, and the company itself has been named as one of the top 10 Best Small Companies to work for in America for 3 years in a row for their relaxed environment, flexible hours, yoga, "Fragfest Fridays", movie nights and indoor 7/11.

PLAYSTATION

Disruptor (1996)
Spyro the Dragon (1998)
Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage (1999)
Spyro: Year of the Dragon (2000)

PLAYSTATION 2

Ratchet & Clank (2002)
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando (a.k.a. *Locked and Loaded*) (2003)
Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal (2004)
Ratchet: Deadlocked (a.k.a. *Gladiator*) (2005)

PLAYSTATION 3

Resistance: Fall of Man (2006)



We think it really breaks up the action when you have to tilt your controller like an idiot to steer a tornado or complete a humourous pirate-themed dancing mini game.

Clank: The technology has merit, Ratchet.

Ratchet: I know, Clank, but that's not my point. It just feels tacked on, like a last-minute thing. But I think we more than make up for it with our new gadgets, like the 'Groovitron' for example.

Clank: Who knew a dance-inducing disco-ball could have genuine tactical benefits, let alone such a funky beat.

Ratchet: And *ToD* is funny, y'know. That's what the fans expect from us: some good laughs while they're blasting away, upgrading weapons and exploring the colourful environments. We switched a few things around a bit, added a tree-like structure to weapon upgrades and even threw in an on-rails space shooter section.

Clank: You can even do a barrel roll.

Ratchet: I see what you did there. *ToD* is shorter than our previous games,

unfortunately, but that's how things go. You can't unlock weapons from our previous games using a memory card [like in *Going Commando* and *Up Your Arsenal*], because all the weapons have been redesigned from scratch - I'm sure you understand.

Clank: We would like to apologise for a bug we've discovered in *ToD* recently - some players will not be able to load the game as it claims to not have enough free space. Adding or deleting approximately 500MB of content from the HDD should remedy this issue.

Ratchet: Heh, yeah, sorry about that folks. Game development is complicated stuff. But we're confident that *ToD* is going to be regarded as one of the best PlayStation 3 games for some time.

Clank: I would have to agree and must say, that visually *ToD* really does represent the vibrant, colourful universe we inhabit in the best way possible.

NAG: That's all we have time for unfortunately, but thank you both for being here and we hope to see you in a sequel soon! **NAG**

Miktar "Lomax Love" Dracon



BOTTOM LINE

Fans won't be disappointed - Ratchet & Clank delivers, and that's all there is too it.

87
OUT OF 100



YOU CAN'T SHOOT THESE WITH AN XM42 CONVECTION BOLTER

Hellgate's release version is teeming with creepy crawlies that were better dealt with a thorough patching. Scorn, hiss, boo, etc. At the time of writing this, the Patch 0 update was available, weighing in at around 70MB. But 'ware theel! If you're intending to patch the game (and we recommend that you do), do so before starting a new game. Patching and reloading a previously-started game comes with its own batch of niggles. Oh, and rumour has it that December's Patch 1 will toss in a new hub area. Yay!



HELLGATE: LONDON

THE YEAR IS 2038. London huddles beneath twilight, the skies weeping cinders, snow and ruin. In the shadowed lanes and alleyways, the gossamer fabric of reality has been torn asunder, opening ragged portals to Hell itself and retching its vengeful, jealous denizens upon our world. Nightmares prowl the streets, and stake claims in the name of their dread lord. Humanity, teetering on the black abyss of extinction in the bloodied wake of this infernal holocaust, has retreated to the underground, seeking sanctuary in the tunnels of the Freemasons. The task of humanity's redemption has fallen upon thy shoulders, oh thou noble and true [Please tick applicable: Hunter / Cabalist / Templar]. Go forth and hit stuff until it turns into stuff that you can loot, praise the lord.

Like the *Diablos* and *Titan Quests* that bravely trod this path before it, *Hellgate: London* is a no-frills, no-brains, click-and-slash/boom-boom extravaganza. Yes, there's this elaborate back story, but it's really almost entirely inconsequential. For all intents and purposes, you might as well be battling the minions of the Muffin Man from Drury Lane, turned renegade against those who denied him. But who needs a complicated story full of unpronounceable

names and profound moral dilemmas interfering with their pillaging anyway? "Not I," said the Engineer, as his trusty drone popped off another battery of rockets into an oncoming patrol of Crested Stalkers, reducing them to a heap of collectible goodies.

So no, *Hellgate: London* won't be redefining the action RPG genre anytime soon, but really, what's left to redefine anyway? In its class, therefore, *Hellgate* delivers in metric tons. It's fast, relentless, drops lots of rad stuff, and offers all sorts of item modification options. Quests, items, and even the areas are randomly generated – every time you reload your game, all the spaces between the station hubs are reconfigured, and you can re-enter an all-new expanse of pandemonium. The interface is streamlined with what we hope is a trend-setting feature – an all-purpose context-sensitive function attached to the CTRL key. When your health sphere is bleeding out, for example, tap CTRL to inject some red stuff back into it (assuming you have med packs in your inventory, of course). Ditto performance-enhancing adrenaline pills, poison antidotes, powerpacks, and shield regenerators.

You'd have to be really cynical or really dead not to love this. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

Diablo with rocket launchers

KINDA LIKE



Mindless violence, big guns and phat lewt

FOR FANS OF



RICK DANGEROUS

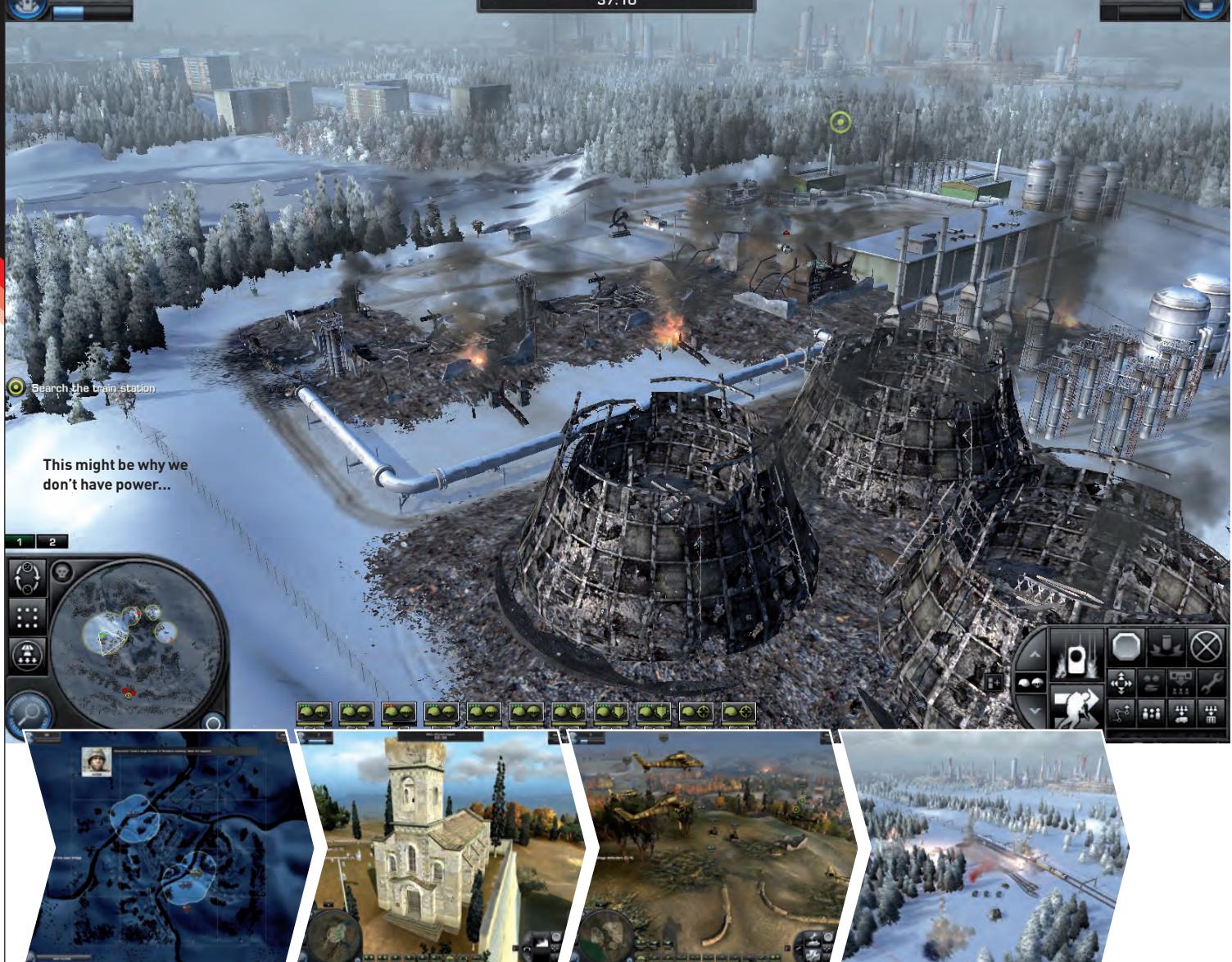
BOTTOM LINE

Strap yourselves in, boys, we're in for some- WAAAAAH, MONSTERS!

86
OUT OF 100







WORLD IN CONFLICT

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED had the Cold War escalated to a not so 'cold' state? This is the premise in *World in Conflict*. The story takes place at the end of the '80s, and unlike most war-themed games, it actually delivers a story, complete with characters and events beyond those within the military campaign. Some of the character development that happens between missions may appear unnecessary to some, but it helps paint a picture of the lives of the in-game voices that you hear while playing. The story line has something of a retro feel to it, as the Soviet-hate portrayed in it is an anachronism these days. Between missions, this story is conveyed by still artwork accompanied by voice-overs. While this may seem antiquated, it actually works very well indeed. Mission-pertinent narrative is presented by means of engine-rendered sequences.

The missions also bring across this cinematic, story-driven feel. As is to be expected, there are ample voice-overs providing objective information, as well as information about changing battlefield situations. However, there is also quite a lot of chatter taking place between in-game characters, defining their personalities.

The graphics in this game is outstanding, in a deceptive manner. In fact, it is quite easy to overlook this fact at first, as the graphics is so realistic that we are blinded to their detailed nature. However, soon enough, the little things start being noticed – such as the fact that buildings in small European towns are arranged almost haphazardly, and therefore look very convincing. The colour palette is also very realistic, so while at first it detracts from the "wow" value, in the long run it serves to immerse the player. Sound effects and the general ambience suit the overall atmosphere of the game.

In Campaign mode, the game's action is very deliberate and less frantic than in multiplayer games. Players have scripted objectives to fulfil, and completion of optional objectives can lead to significant battlefield advantages as well as the token medals and ribbons that are earned for their completion. There is no resource model as such in this game; instead, the player has a number of points to spend on reinforcements, and these are slowly reimbursed when troops are destroyed. Thus, this game is classified as a real-time tactics game rather than an RTS. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Ground Control II



BETTER THAN



Your very own tactical nuclear weapon

WORSE THAN



BOTTOM LINE

A tactically demanding game with a very authentic feel.

79
OUT OF 100





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PUZZLE QUEST: CHALLENGE OF THE WARLORDS [PC]

RRP → \$19.99

Publisher → D3 Publisher

Distributor → www.gamersgate.com

Genre → Puzzle/RPG

PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

Puzzles and role-playing games just go well together. Puzzles are yin and the RPG's yang, peanut butter to its jelly, Chapman to its Cleese. Typically, though, it's always been the RPG that contains puzzle elements. Developer Infinite Interactive has broken the mould and managed to create a fantastic puzzle game with RPG elements in *Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords*.

Don't let the puzzle-game label fool you, though: this is not your typical casual, gem-swapping *Bejeweled* clone. Casual gamers may find the level of depth and story in *Puzzle Quest* to be a bit daunting. If you simply want to mindlessly match tiles to pass the time, stick to *Bejeweled*. If, however, you find that genre of game to be a little one dimensional, or if you like RPGs but can't invest hours at a time, then *Puzzle Quest* is perfect for you.

The gameplay in the PC version is identical to the Xbox LIVE version of the game; your character is matched up against a baddie in a gem-swapping duel to the death. You can match three or more coloured gems together to build up one of four colours of mana, which you can then use to cast spells. Alternatively, you can match skull tiles together to deal damage directly to your foe. After battles, you gain money and experience, which you can use to buy items and improve your characters' skills to increase the potency of your attacks.

Where the PC version differs from the XBLA version is in its multiplayer features. Whereas the Xbox version lets you use the LIVE service to find an opponent to play, the PC version is much more limited. You can play against another person via a LAN or you can play someone over the Internet, but only by specifying his or her IP address. There are no dedicated servers or lobby areas devoted to online play for the PC.

Despite this minor limitation, *Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords* is a winner.

Chris Bistline



them to gain gold per turn.

Puzzle Quest comes in a variety of flavours: Nintendo DS and Wii, Sony PSP and PS2, PC and Xbox LIVE Arcade, with the latter being generally regarded as the best version due to its improved online play. Players can battle each other online and the experience and gold gained during online battle transfers directly to the single-player campaign.

It's not the type of game that will appeal to everyone, especially not people who have a firm distaste for the influence of randomness on their actions. For everyone else, it's well worth a look.

NAG
Miktar "Fantasy Apex Predator" Dracon**BOTTOM LINE**

Has plenty to offer, is fun to play and actually ties into Warlords [remember Battle Cry?].

89
OUT OF 100
**BOTTOM LINE**

The parts may seem commonplace, but the sum is something refreshingly unique and dangerously addictive.

85
OUT OF 100


PUZZLE QUEST: CHALLENGE OF THE WARLORDS [360]

THE SHORT OF IT: *Bejeweled* copulated with an RPG and the resultant offspring was reared on a heavy diet of strategy and told plenty of fantasy bedtime stories.

The long of it: *Puzzle Quest* is an interesting blend between a competitive-style *Bejeweled* gem matching system used to simulate combat and other activities often found in role-playing games (such as crafting items, capturing creatures or learning spells), and an overall strategy game that involves questing, building your Citadel and fighting monsters.

To elaborate, combat takes place as a turn-based puzzle where the player and computer-controlled opponent take turns swapping the position of two horizontally or vertically adjacent tiles on a grid to make a row or column of at least three like tiles. These tiles are then removed, which causes various effects and new tiles fall in to fill the spaces. If a group of three or more is made by the falling tiles, they are also removed and the chain can cascade indefinitely. The longer the chain, the more bonuses the player earns.

Tiles come in a variety of gem colours and removing them gives you mana of the same colour, which can then be used to cast spells that either damage your opponent or help you set up fantastic combination moves. Skull tiles are used to directly damage the other player, while experience tiles and gold tiles raise your experience and gold respectively. Gold can be used to buy items such as weapons and armour, or upgrade your Citadel.

During the game, you can find companions that provide various bonuses in battle – some companions are gained via choices, others are assigned to you through plot progression. Companions may even interact with each other in sub-plots. Once certain facilities are built at your Citadel, you can capture monsters to learn spells from them or attack cities and conquer



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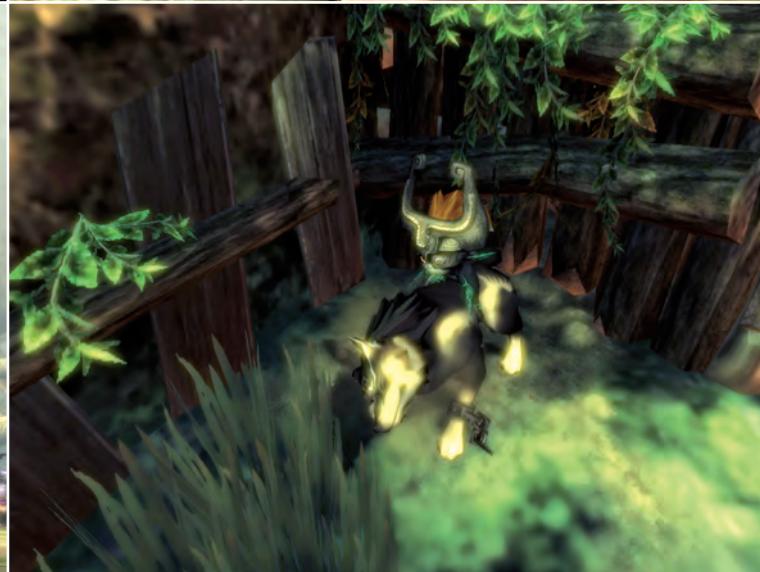
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DOMINATE





THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

I'LL BE THE FIRST to admit that *The Legend of Zelda* series was never a huge draw card to Nintendo's consoles for me. Yes, I have played a few of the old *Zelda* games, but I never thought of them as absolutely brilliant. That was until now. I was asked to review one of the first Wii games to hit our shores, *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*. I would now have to play a *Zelda* game from start to finish. I must say, though, that I was pleasantly surprised. *Twilight Princess* was, for me, a completely unique gaming experience on the Wii. It has the elements of a classic Nintendo adventure while at the same time providing a very compelling storyline. I've felt that this has been lacking in most of the games I have played recently. Then there is the puzzle element, which is creative and clever. These puzzles maintain the perfect balance for all ages and are not difficult to solve, but also not easy. For example, in one section a player has to figure out how to fill up a room with water by using an aqueduct system that rotates depending on various switches. In another section, the player must use his or her logic to get around a room full of magnetic platforms. There are also times when the player must take on Link's new wolf

form and scavenge in the dirt for clues or follow someone's scent to find them.

As always, players assume the role of Link, who, with the help of a creature named Midna, must save the world of Hyrule from being plunged into eternal twilight. There will be times when Link must enter zones of pure twilight (it is at this point where he is turned into the wolf mentioned earlier).

While the game is almost flawless with very few technical glitches and the like, it does have one slight problem: the sound's a bit lacking. You go through the entire game hearing the swishing of your sword and the shooting of your arrows, with a few gusts of wind here and there, but almost no voices or unique sound effects. The music also gets a bit repetitive after a while. However, this is only a minor setback and one that can be easily overlooked. In terms of graphics, the game is pretty solid, and while the game features some outdated graphics in some sections, there are other sections that are actually quite breathtaking. It does show that the Wii, although it is still considered a last-gen console, has some very good graphics. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



Rescuing the damsel in distress
AS GOOD AS


FOR FANS OF



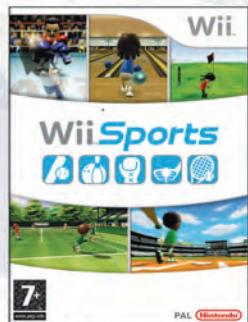

BOTTOM LINE

Saving the world of Hyrule never seemed so intriguing.

92
OUT OF 100



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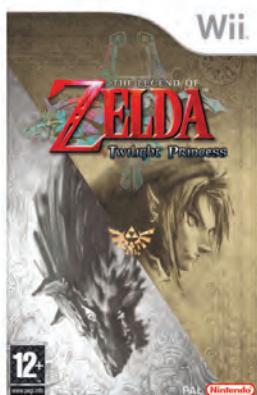
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SEGA RALLY

IREMEMBER MANY, MANY YEARS ago. I had just gotten a Voodoo2 for my old AMD-powered rig, and my CD-ROM was still pretty new and advanced. I had the perfect setup to install *SEGA Rally* 2. This brought me many, many hours of fun. Needless to say, I was like a giggling little girl when I got handed a copy of the new *SEGA Rally*. What was I to expect? What type of game could this be? Would it be fun? Well, how can I say this with enough truth without adding a sound clip of me screaming like a banshee? *SEGA Rally* is not just fun; it's not just pretty, it doesn't just play like a dream. Thanks to a tiny little detail, it might just be revolutionary. When you load this game, do yourself a favour: don't expect something like *Dirt*. *SEGA Rally* is an arcade game, past the mud and to the bone. Flat-out acceleration, huge braking zones, and funny looking African wild life. Yup, not a lot of thought is needed, just squeeze past and win. The game is so much arcade-like that you need to click 'OK' on almost every option screen. You know: manual or automatic, on-road or off-road – just keep clicking. When you finally start the game, you are bombarded by those familiar arcade sounds and colours; the countdown begins and you are off. Let's pause for a while. This game won't eat coins, so it's okay. Difficulty is decided by the league you drive in. In each

one, the AI gets faster. And though you have all the famous rally cars, they seem to handle pretty much the same, though there is a split between beginner and pro cars. And yes, you have different paint schemes, so you won't get confused online. So, let's un-pause. Tyres scream and the mud starts flying. The first tip the game gives you is that puddles might wash mud off your car, but they make you go slower. Heed the warning people: *SEGA Rally*'s road surface deforms – really. Each car leaves perfect, lasting and very tricky to navigate tracks and ditches in the road. Useful when taking fast corners, you know – just get stuck in the last perfect line. Disastrous when trying to overtake, because you bounce, jump and dip all over the place. Trust me, after experiencing changing terrain in a racing game, you'd wish all games had it. Maybe the only true setback is that the cars sound like over-eager lawnmowers gunning down a grassless country looking for seedlings to devour. But you get over that the first time you hit one of those big puddles and you notice the tracks running out of it, carrying with them long fingers of car-sliding water. All in all the game rocks. Yes, it's not the best-looking game, and yes, it doesn't have the most tracks or music, but it's fun. It looks friendly and plays accordingly.

NAG
Eddie Francis

Not having a deforming terrain

BETTER THAN

They have always been

AS GOOD AS

80

OUT OF 100

(A)
(X)
(Y)
(Z)

BOTTOM LINE

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FIFA 08

EASPORTS' *FIFA* FRANCHISE has finally arrived on the PlayStation 3 with *FIFA 08*, and although the game is far from perfect, it's a definite step in the right direction for the series. Many of the glaring errors of last year's lacklustre instalment have been remedied in *FIFA 08*, which also marks a significant departure from the typical *FIFA* style of play.

This time around, the game features 30 different playable leagues from around the world (up from last year's measly six leagues), totalling approximately 15,000 professional players and 620 licensed teams. In addition to a number of real-world tournaments, the game lets you create custom competitions, featuring club or international teams of your choice.

Of course, the bulk of the game is still found in the Season mode, though this is complemented by the inclusion of online leagues mirroring fixtures taking place in the real world, as well as the return of the enjoyable Manager mode. New to the series is 'Be a Pro' mode where, in a departure from tradition, instead of controlling an entire team, you control one player in a single position through an entire match. Your performance is rated according to how well you stay in position, the quality of your passes, and generally fulfilling your specific role in the team. It's a novel and entertaining twist on the typical play dynamic.

One of the most significant alterations is the pace of play in *FIFA 08*. The emphasis of

the game is on realism: fourteen-nil score lines are a thing of the past, with success now being dependent on accurate passing and putting constant pressure on your opponent's defenders until you find an opportunity for a breakthrough. It's a change that may at first be frustrating to veterans of the series, and combined with the improved AI (which is still not without its flaws), it makes for a much more difficult experience than *FIFA* fans are used to. Nevertheless, it does make the game significantly more realistic and goals all the more rewarding.

Another emphasized aspect of *FIFA 08* is the skill move system, whereby the right analogue stick is used to perform various tricks to elude defenders. Unfortunately, as with prior *FIFA* titles, the tricks are often difficult to perform and clumsy, making them all but useless against anything but a human opponent.

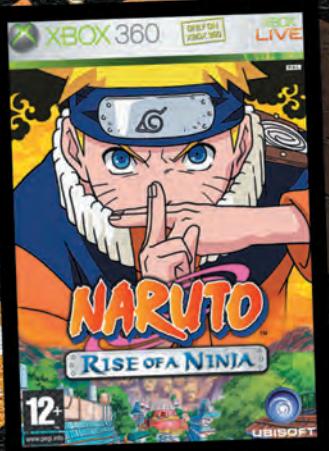
The visuals are by far the best of any current football title, with well-detailed characters that do well to mimic their real-world counterparts, fluid animations, and near-perfect reproductions of the 23 stadiums featured. Commentary is once again provided by the duo of Martin Tyler and Andy Gray, and although it's an improvement over previous versions, it's still rather uninspired and quickly becomes monotonous.

FIFA 08 marks a definite return to form for the *FIFA* series, with a newfound emphasis on patient and strategic play. It still has a few

rough edges, and it requires more discipline than *FIFA* fans may be used to, but it's a solid PS3 debut for the series. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

FIFA 07	
BETTER THAN	
Licensed football titles	
FOR FANS OF	
BOTTOM LINE	
Successful PS3 debut, albeit one that breaks from <i>FIFA</i> tradition.	
79 OUT OF 100	



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OBSCURE II

OBSCURE TOOK SURVIVAL HORROR out of its single-player style and lofted it into the multiplayer arena. In *ObsCure*, you could now be scared with your friends. *ObsCure II* does the same thing [obviously] as it continues the tale that ended with many dead people in the first game.

Of course, the question that arises is this: Should survival horror be multiplayer? You could argue it for hours, I guess. I prefer my horror games solo, but that doesn't mean that playing two-player horror games is a bad idea. However, when you're playing a game with a friend, it really must be scary to break down any form of emotional support that the players grant each other. In other words, it needs to be scary enough to scare two people. *ObsCure II*, when all is said and done, isn't. Sure, it has lots of frightful moments and a few creepy ones, but these days, clones [even if they are sequel clones] don't really do well. Horror needs to be fresh and different to be truly scary [take the original *Silent Hill* as a good example]. *ObsCure II* draws on far too many other influences and when it does try to scare the player, it relies on quick frights and jumps rather than bone-chilling implications and pure creepiness. Even the combat isn't scary enough. Sure, the monsters in this game [which are basically mutated plants] are pretty tough to take down, but the very nature of the game – the multiplayer aspect – means that combat needs to be simpler to handle. Running away from a monster is bad enough when you're in a

single-player panic; it's near impossible in a multiplayer game. Basically, if you're looking to be frightened, look elsewhere.

However, if you want an interesting co-op game that is resplendent with B-movie clichés and is actually a lot of fun to play, then it's a good option. With the degree of violence, it's almost more 'splatter-house' than traditional horror, and the combat encounters are pretty entertaining in multiplayer mode [as is the arguing about who gets to use the better weapons that are fairly liberally scattered around the game].

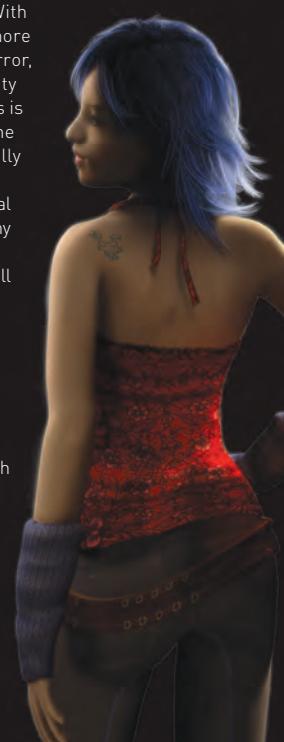
If you played and enjoyed the original *ObsCure*, then there is little reason why this game shouldn't appeal to you. It's the same kind of college-kid horror, full of off-colour comments [generally of a sexual nature], grainy graphics, and cheesy dialogue. As an homage to B-movie slashers, it does a good job.

The control scheme isn't too convoluted, and a player in single-player mode can easily switch between characters on the fly. Hints are clear, with generous activation zones. Teamwork is required for the multiplayer game, simply because the close camera necessitates the players sticking together to some degree.

ObsCure II is a fun game. It's probably not going to win any kind

of award, but it is good for a few enjoyable hours. There are far better horror games out there, but the co-op aspect is fun. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



ObsCure



BETTER THAN



WORSE THAN



BOTTOM LINE

Fun as a co-op game, but not very scary.

78
OUT OF 100



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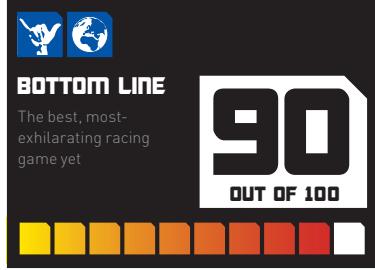
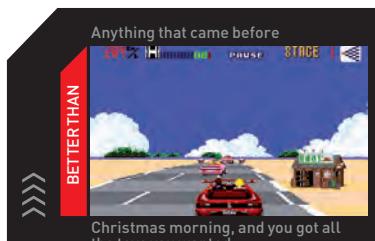


PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 4

IT'S THAT TIME OF the year again. You know, when you have to fake illness to stay at home. You have to lie to family and friends so that they stay away. You have to put your cell on charge permanently – in another room. And why, you ask, would you want to do this? Well, it's *Project Gotham* time. Yes *Project Gotham Racing 4* is here, and it's here in force. When you pop the disc into your Xbox 360, be prepared. As with its older brother, the fourth edition is probably one of the best-looking, -feeling and -playing racing games of all time. Sticking with what works, *PGR 4* operates pretty much the same as number three. You buy your cars and then blast off to a world of races, cone sprints and perfect laps. But in all honesty, that has little to nothing to do with this game's charm. As mentioned, *PGR 4* looks good. Flying down streets in Tokyo, London or any of the other venues, your retinas are bombarded with millions of colours that blur and blend in a seamless mixture of pure bliss. Even the odd glimpse of the McDonald's arches isn't enough to spoil the effect. Mix into this the perfectly modelled cars that pull up behind, next to and in front of you. Luckily, for those of us who have slightly less evolved nerves, you can keep your eyes closed during all of this and still keep your wits about you. This is thanks to some of the most-advanced

sound effects ever heard. For example, if your front wheel, the one on the right, goes through a puddle, well, that's what it sounds like. Sure, sceptics will say, "Looks good, sounds good, but does it feel good too?" Our reply to them would be: "Well, when last did you see AI players start passing moves on you? When last did you see them flick into your slip stream only to brake late into a corner and overtake?" It's true people, the AI is not just tricky but horribly smart. Thing are made more fun by the fact that AI-controlled cars will stick to you like glue for true wheel-to-wheel racing. Now, you might ask, "How will I keep them at bay then?" Well, it's simple: brave driving, taking chances, and learning to drive in the rain. Yes, rejoice, there is rain in racing games again. Brilliant, wet, slippery rain. There are puddles everywhere, and they pull your car every which way. Overall, this game rocks harder than most geologists. It is intense fun, but watch out for heart attacks and chest pains – this game will make you sweat blood. The only downside, but one most racing games seem to share (like *Forza 2*, *PGR 3* and many others), *PGR 4* stops working after a while. It just freezes. So try get you thrills early. Please Xbox, fix yourself. We need to get all *PGR 4*'s achievements. **NAG**

Eddie Francis





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SAM & MAX: ICE STATION SANTA

WERE ADVENTURE GAMES HARD? I remember playing *Fate of Atlantis* when I was twelve or something. It was tough and we had no access to walk-throughs. But we did have the number of a guy who had finished it, so whenever we got stuck, we dialled him up and got some advice. I don't know if he ever got annoyed at us bugging him, but we were too focused on getting further into the story. When I cast my mind back, there were actually a few hard adventure games. How many agonising hours were lost at the opening sequence of *Space Quest*? Did anyone else struggle through most of *The Dig*? And if you could clock *Phantasmagoria* without a walkthrough, have you considered that you might not be right in the head? Sure, they were fun, but a lot of them were hardcore. That includes *Sam & Max*, which was fiendish with its lateral puzzles. The second punch came from its great story and script.

When the pair were resurrected in episodic content, fans soon realised that certain things were being sacrificed to make their return possible. The new adventures were a lot more compact and relied far more on dialogue and setups than puzzle depth to keep things rolling. If you were hoping for a major change in that formula, I have to disappoint you. *Ice Station Santa* still follows the episodic line.

You must be wondering why? And is it still worth it? As you may recall, these games used

to be very hard. This one isn't, but on top of that, it comes with a tutorial and optional hint system (which actually works). That seems to suggest that a lot of *Episode 1*'s players still found the game daunting. I'd thumb suck that Adventure hardcored itself into a coma. If we want a resurrection, there'd be a price to pay. So, if you love adventure games, stop being a cheap bastard and buy this game.

But say you are not one of those people or my argument hasn't clinched the deal yet. Fine – Sam and Max get attacked by a giant robot sent by Santa. When they go to the North Pole to chat to him, he's locked in the study with an automatic weapon. It's still a small game with few locations, but you'll get to time-travel as well. Okay, the puzzles are really simple, but it might get a lot more people to start playing adventure games, which is exactly what the fans want.

Not that *Ice Station Santa* needs your charity. It's a good game and a lot has been done to shine it up. Telltale must be feeling a lot more confident, because this is a confident game. The jokes are funny and the journey is a lot of fun, even though it's pretty short. But the argument that it's episodic still stands: at the end of the season you'll have six of these games, each costing you less than a cheap budget title. *Ice Station Santa* kicks Season 2 off on a good high. I'm personally only expecting great things going forward. **NAG**

James Francis

BETTER THAN

Sam & Max Season 1

Point 'n Click adventure

King's Quest III

FOR FANS OF

King's Quest III

BOTTOM LINE

It still has flaws, but get over them and start adventuring again

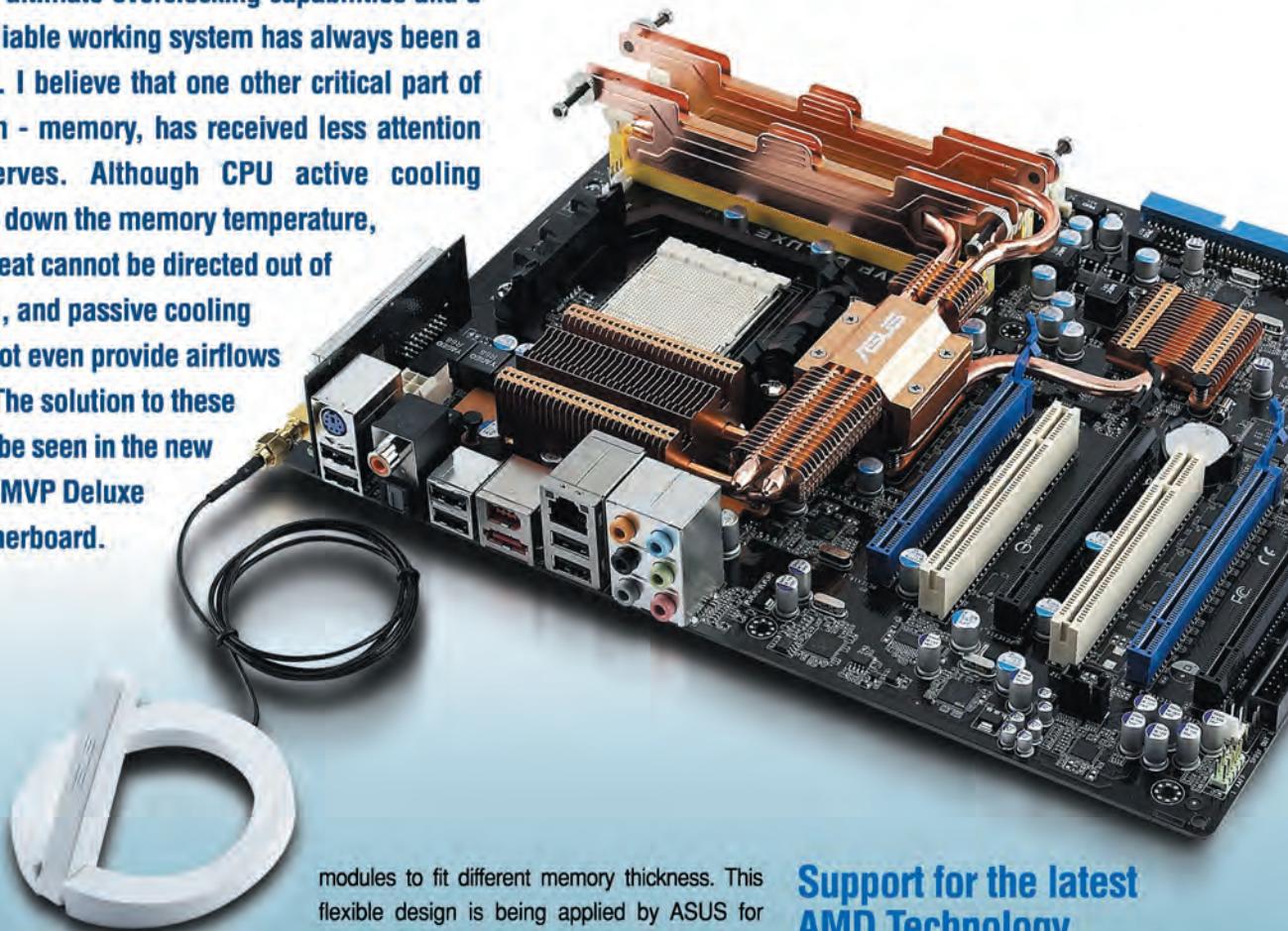
85 OUT OF 100

ASUS M3A32-MVP Deluxe/WiFi-AP Edition

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The pursuit of ultimate overclocking capabilities and a steady and reliable working system has always been a user's delight. I believe that one other critical part of the PC system - memory, has received less attention than it deserves. Although CPU active cooling solutions cool down the memory temperature, the memory heat cannot be directed out of the PC system, and passive cooling solutions do not even provide airflows for memory. The solution to these problems can be seen in the new ASUS M3A32-MVP Deluxe /WiFi-AP motherboard.



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With Cool Mempipe

58.2°C



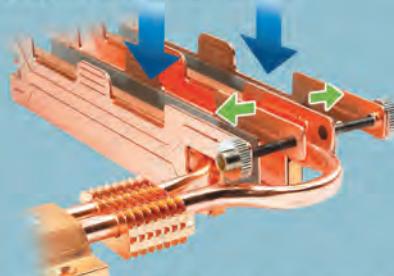
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▲ Adjustable memory heat pipe to fit any type of memory module.



COLIN MCRAE: DiRT

RRP → R615 | Publisher → Codemasters | Distributor → Ster Kinekor Games | Genre → Racing

ALREADY RELEASED FOR THE Xbox 360 and PC, *Colin McRae: DiRT*, the latest in the successful line of rally titles bearing the name of the late and great professional, marks a well thought-out revisit of the series and a worthy addition to the collection of any PS3 owner with an interest in rally games.

Offering a variety of different off-road racing disciplines, including Hill Climb, Rallycross, Crossover, and traditional rallies, *DiRT* offers a much more comprehensive experience than any of its predecessors. The variety of available vehicles includes buggies, SUVs, and even trucks. The game's adjustable difficulty also means that novices as well as aficionados will be able to compete without feeling overwhelmed or under-satisfied, though the overly arcade-like physics, while allowing spectacularly exciting driving and

breathtaking crashes, does occasionally tend towards the absurd.

Spectacular visuals with superbly detailed vehicles, perfectly engineered landscapes and some truly incredible damage modelling, not to mention the beautiful menu interface, make *DiRT* a wonder to look at. In addition, the framerate issues that plagued *DiRT* on other platforms have just about been eliminated. Sound effects and background music are also well done. However, the voice-overs by Travis Pastrana, despite offering pertinent information about game modes and vehicle statistics, quickly become quite annoying, but not enough to affect the game experience.

DiRT is let down, though, by a Spartan multiplayer mode, which only allows you to compete in time trials against other players, with no 'live' racing action to be enjoyed.

In spite of this, *DiRT* manages to offer an all-encompassing off-road experience, striking a good balance between depth and accessibility. It's fast, fun and exciting, if not as realistic as fans may be used to, and it looks great to boot. **NAG**

Adam Liebman



BOTTOM LINE

Deep but approachable rally title with some spectacular visuals.

82
OUT OF 100



LOCO MANIA

RRP → R139 | Publisher → Lighthouse Interactive | Distributor → Apex Interactive | Genre → Strategy/Simulation | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

THREE ARE TWO NEW Sims 2 expansions out, but somehow, I ended up with the railway simulator. This is gross boy stuff. Whatever happened to good old-fashioned stereotyping and its wholesale subscription? This is me having a big girly cry.

Anyway, onto the review. Despite my previous statement – and all outwards appearances, as it happens – this isn't actually a railway simulator. It's a strategy game ingeniously disguised as a railway simulator. The premise is simple enough. There's an area, and this area is cross-hatched with railways, as well as a number of entry and exit points scattered around. Once you've donned your invisible railway conductor hat, your job is to guide trains from entry to exit, without significant catastrophe and preferably rather quickly. Of course, all

sorts of complications are thrown in – some trains need to stop at certain stations, other trains are carrying biohazardous freight, you've got only ten minutes, that sort of thing. With great fortitude and wit, you must manipulate signal lights, semaphore, and rail switches, and – well, actually that's about it – to keep the grid running and the trains on time. People have places to be, after all, mostly somewhere far away from this game.

While it's a solid and potentially mildly engaging concept, the implementation is rotten. The tutorial, for starters, doesn't actually really teach you how to play. So an hour or so into it, I still couldn't understand why my two trains were just parked in front of their exit tunnels, resolutely refusing my barked orders to "sodding go!". This problem was exacerbated by a petulantly sluggish

camera and terrain that kept getting in the way. If they make a *Loco Mania 2*, we can only hope they include an Apocalypse mode, so you can visit fiery vengeance upon it all. **NAG**

Tarryn "Oh, just smash into each other and take me with you" van der Byl



BOTTOM LINE

It quickly runs out of steam. Da-dum tish.

40
OUT OF 100



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CSI: 3 DIMENSIONS OF MURDER

RRP → R279 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Adventure

ALTHOUGH *CSI: 3 Dimensions of Murder* was released quite some time ago for the PC (and was the first 3D *CSI* game – get the pun in the name? Get it? Get it?), it has taken some time to get to other platforms. In other words, this game is basically a port from the PC to the PS2. Thankfully, it was well handled, with the controls and dynamics behind the game modified for the PS2 very well. Full marks there.

Unlike the PC version of this game, visual hints (like the cursor changing colour when rolling over a clue) are scarce in this version. Again, a good thing – although sometimes not spotting a hair on the victim across the room gets a bit frustrating. The control scheme is a little finicky at times, but gentle controller

use should overcome that problem without too much hassle.

Still, though, it's hardly a new game. It looks good for a PS2 title and it plays well, but if you've played the PC version, you're hardly going to want to play this one. Additionally, while the cases may seem simple, building the chain of evidence between the crime and the suspect can be a pedantic and frustrating process... particularly if you didn't spot that hair on the victim's body from across the room.

Fans of the show should enjoy this game, and *CSI: 3 Dimensions of Murder* is clearly aimed at this market. While it is a bit tougher than the PC version (those darned missing visual hints), it is still a slow-paced and easy

game – more mass market than hardcore. It's worth a try, though, if you fancy yourself as an armchair investigator and haven't played the PC version of the same name. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



BOTTOM LINE

Fans of the TV show may like it.

70
OUT OF 100



CSI: HARD EVIDENCE

RRP → R139 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Adventure | PC Spec →

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

THIS *CSI* THING JUST keeps growing as this immensely popular TV series ploughs forward (despite, I might add, several inaccuracies that have been pointed out by the show's critics). The PC games keep being churned out as well, probably to feed the need of the folks who want to 'experience' the thrill of busting bad guys by following the evidence. (Not that the player needs to be a canny investigator while playing this game.) The game presents the player with various scenes, which can generally be scrolled around. When the mouse cursor passes over something significant, it turns green. So, in essence, you can either solve the cases by having a sharp eye and nose for details, or you can simply slowly sweep the mouse cursor over the entire screen and click on all the things that go green. Either

method will work, but somehow the latter just doesn't seem to be right.

Investigating a case in this game isn't quite as straightforward as it appears though. A lot of 'back and forth' between the various available locations is generally required, and some of the connections between clues need a little more thought to figure out. There is a hints system, of course, but the point is to try and not use it. And that's where things get tricky. In four of the five cases presented in this game, I figured out who the guilty party was very quickly – but a clear line of evidence needs to be established, linking the crime to the perpetrator. That's where this game's challenge might lie. Other than that, it's simple and easy to play. It's also very short, which is a sad thing... Nevertheless, despite the ease of solving the crimes at times, it's still

good fun.

Fans of *CSI* should enjoy this title. Hardcore gamers would probably balk at its very relaxed pace and simple controls though. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



BOTTOM LINE

Not bad for *CSI* fans, although very easy.

70
OUT OF 100





SKATE.

RRP → R549 | Publisher → Electronic Arts | Distributor → EA South Africa | Genre → Sport

A VID READERS MAY ALREADY suspect that we love *skate*, and that we simply cannot get enough of it. We are happy to admit that this is true, and that *skate* has managed to really capture our aging hearts and given us a reprieve to kick flip and ollie our way to skateboarding heaven without the broken ankles inherent in the physical sport. Our review of the 360 version confirms this (pg 84 – November 2007).

When the PlayStation 3 version arrived at the office, our spirits ran high that this would simply be an additional avenue for the game to entice and delight another whole demographic of gamers, namely those who are PS3 exclusive. This next comment may be superfluous but it needs saying: NAG is not anti-PS3, as many may believe, and we have no allegiances to any specific platform. We

are platform agnostic, not to make too fine a point of it.

The PS3 version of *skate*. has left us with unmitigated regret because in plain, honest truth – it sucks. For some unknown reason, the PS3 version suffers from what can only be described as atrocious framerate issues. We're not just talking about the occasional slowdown; the game literally drops to a choppy nightmare-inducing crawl whenever there are more than two pedestrians on screen or when you skate over one of the invisible borders that signals the game to load the next chunk of San Vanelona. It happens far too often for comfort, and it messes with the timing on your tricks and gets in the way of enjoying the game properly. Perhaps if we had never seen the 360 version, we might have been more

forgiving because *skate*. is brilliant, no doubt about that.

But we cannot, in good conscience, recommend the PS3 version to anyone. We're sorry. **NAG**

Miktar "wtfbbq" Dracon



BOTTOM LINE

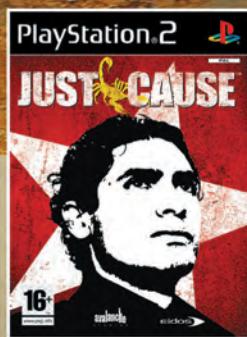
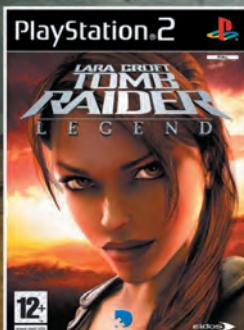
The game is great, but this specific incarnation of it is a slap in the face to PS3 owners.

39
OUT OF 100



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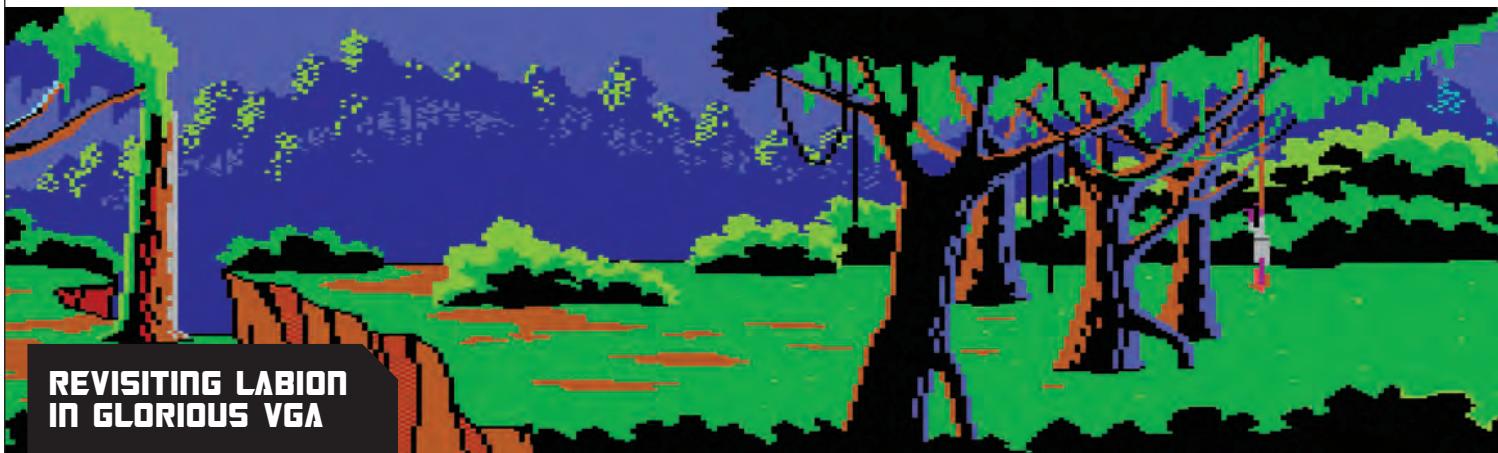
SPACE QUEST II LOOKING BACK

WHY SPACE QUEST II instead of I or III or IV or V or VI, you might ask? Well, we convened a meeting in the topmost tower of NAG HQ, and sat around an enormous brushed-steel desk, stroking our beards and sipping taurine-infused beverages. After some five or six hours of passing around the talking stick and sharing of profound sagacity, it was finally decided that while the others certainly had their not inconsiderable merits, *Space Quest II* represented the last of the Great AGI Text Parser Adventure Games (see boxout).

Having almost inadvertently foiled the Sariens' fiendish plot for pangalactic domination with their stolen Star Generator, bumbling janitor Roger Wilco is now aboard Xenon Orbital Station 4. His momentary fame has all but faded into the yawning eternity of deep space, and he once again finds himself doing what he does best – cleaning stuff.

While out dusting some far-flung nook (or possibly cranny) of the station, Wilco is summoned to one of the loading bays, where a shuttle has recently arrived amid reports of turbulence-induced chundering. Shortly after entering this vessel, however, Wilco finds himself the somewhat startled victim of a kidnapping operation.

Upon regaining consciousness, he is brought before Sludge Vohaul, corpulent grotesquery and vindictive mastermind of the worsted Sarien operation. In that peculiar way that villains do, Vohaul proceeds to disclose the details of his latest scheme – something involving a plague of cloned insurance salesman and an unsuspecting universe. Wilco is then summarily shipped off to Labion, there to eke out the remainder of his shabby existence in the mines. Obviously, things don't go quite according to plan.



REVISITING LABION IN GLORIOUS VGA

Before going bang back in the mid-90s, Sierra's adventure department remade several of their AGI-era games with the later 256-colour VGA-enhanced SCI engine, including *Space Quest I*, *Police Quest I*, and *Quest for Glory I*. Since then, using fan-made utilities like Adventure Game Studio, many people have tried their own hand at recreating AGI titles in 256-colour point-and-click splendour. Infamous Adventures (www.infamous-adventures.com) has been working on their own remake of *Space Quest II* since April 2007. We've blagged ourselves an early build of the game, and it's hotter than an Astro Chicken Flight Hat.



THE GREAT AGI TEXT PARSER ADVENTURE GAMES

Sierra's Adventure Game Interpreter first appeared in the 1984 seminal adventure game, *King's Quest I: Quest for the Crown*. At the time, its 16-colour pseudo-3D visuals and 320 x 200 resolution were on the cutting edge of game technology. Most AGI games used a text parser – while the cursor keys were used to move your character around the screen, players had to direct the action by typing in commands like LOOK AROUND and RUB BERRIES ON BODY and HOLD GLOWING GEM IN MOUTH. The engine was succeeded in 1990 by the more advanced Sierra Creative Interpreter or SCI. Other Text Parser Games built with AGI include:

King's Quest I: Quest for the Crown (1984)
King's Quest II: Romancing the Throne (1985)
King's Quest III: To Heir is Human (1986)
Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter (1986)
Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards (1987)
Police Quest I: In Pursuit of the Death Angel (1987)
Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge (1987)
Gold Rush (1988)
King's Quest IV: The Perils of Rosella (1988; the AGI version is exceedingly rare as the game was simultaneously developed for AGI and SCI)

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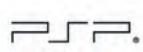
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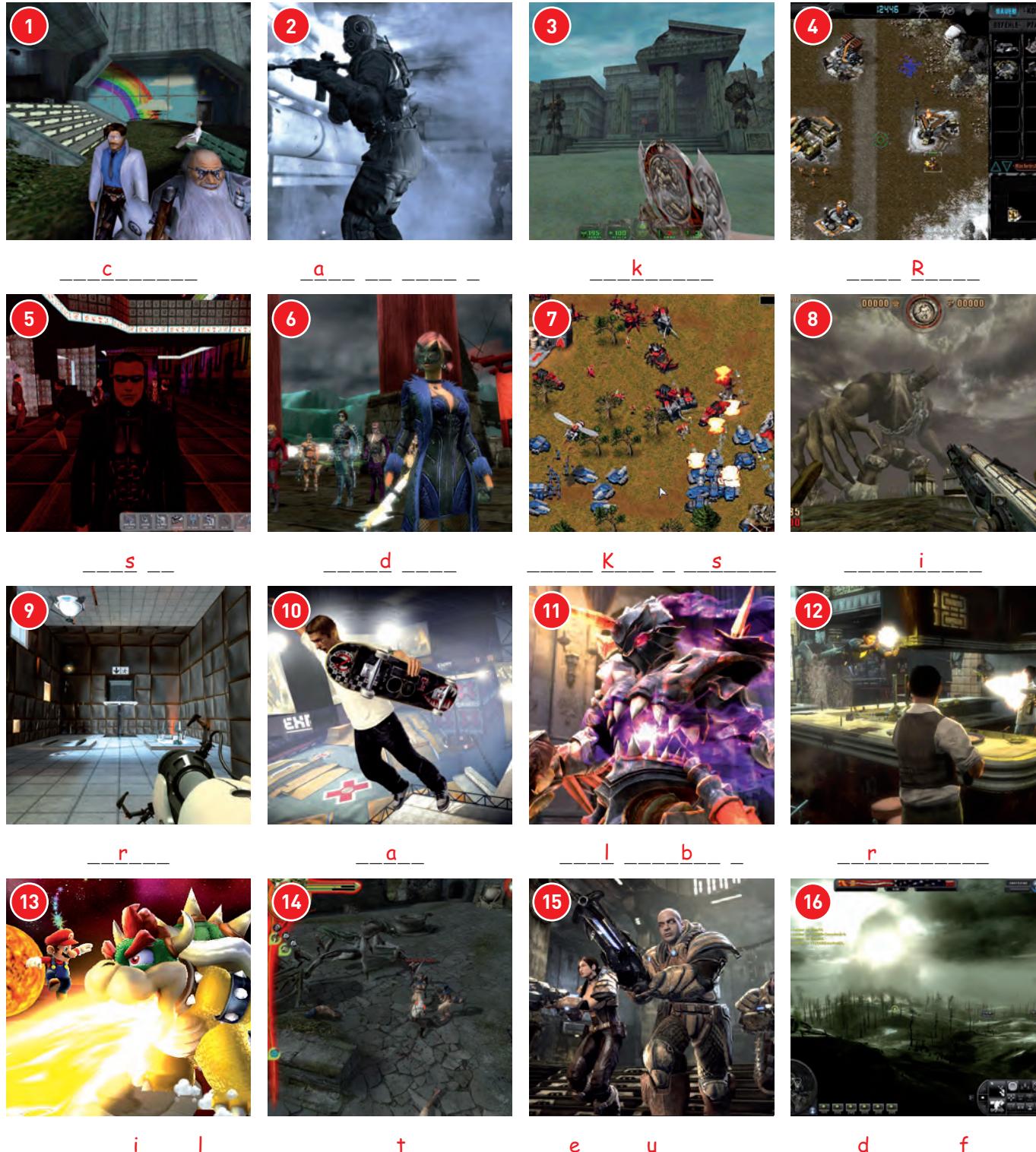
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LAST MONTH'S GAMES: 1. Baldur's Gate; 2. Crash Bandicoot; 3. Devil May Cry; 4. Dungeon Siege; 5. Far Cry; 6. Halo 3; 7. Marble Madness; 8. Mega Man; 9. New Zealand Story; 10. Quake Wars; 11. Quake; 12. Shogo; 13. Strife; 14. Team Fortress 2; 15. Titan Quest; 16. Xevious

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REVIEWS

BOMBERMAN DELUXE

Publisher → Living Mobile | Genre → Action/Puzzle | Reviewed on → Sony Ericsson K800i | Rating → 88
 Download → SMS NAG1212 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R20

THE WONDERFUL THING ABOUT technology and the way that everything gets smaller is that games we enjoyed years ago can now be played on mobile phone handsets. Not only that, but they tend to be better than they were the first time around. Ah yes, I love the smell of technology in the morning. Any time, actually.

Take this gem, for example. I remember spending absolute hours playing this on my Golden China machine way back when. *Bomberman* was a simple yet addictive game that required a bit of strategy and some quick wit. It was the perfect quick game, but could also consume many hours of playing time.

The same goes for this mobile version. The graphics is better, and the game dynamic is a little different, but the game is essentially exactly as the older gamers will remember it.

For those who don't know the game: *Bomberman* entails blasting your way

through a maze of blocks. Some of these blocks can be destroyed, while others can't. The player places bombs to get rid of these blocks, being careful to avoid the blast radius (or blast-lines, to be a bit more accurate). There are a variety of 'enemies' that roam the maze as well, with different behaviour patterns. Some just roam, others will actively chase the player's character. Of course, a well-placed (and timed) bomb will take care of them very nicely.

With bomb upgrades, speed upgrades and special devices, the game gets very fast and very tricky after playing for a while. *Bomberman Deluxe* can be massively frustrating, but it's essentially a huge amount of fun. It's simplicity in concept and gameplay makes it the perfect title for mobile. It is great for a quick game, or for a protracted playing session – much like its predecessor was.

NAG

Walt Pretorius



CSI: MIAMI – THE MOBILE GAME

Publisher → Gameloft | Genre → Puzzle
 Reviewed on → Sony Ericsson K800i | Rating → 55
 Download → SMS NAG1213 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

IT'S ONE THING TO have a licensed title available to buy. We won't go into the whole "guaranteed sale" thing. But it's quite another when that title doesn't live up to the expectations of the people who are going to play it.

I am a fan of the *CSI* games on all platforms (not really the TV series, but that's neither here nor there.) The games always tend to be a little easy, but the five or so interesting cases are quite entertaining. *CSI: Miami – the Mobile Game* also features an interesting case. One. And, because of the visual hints the game gives the player, the case can be a little too easy to solve. It's going to take around half an hour; maybe an hour because of some of the tougher clues. And then that's it. End of story. Sure, you could replay the game in the more difficult modes unlocked when completing the case, but the fact is that you'll be playing the same case over and over again. It's just not good enough.

NAG

Walt Pretorius



RATATOUILLE

Publisher → THQ Wireless | Genre → Adventure
 Reviewed on → Motorola KRZR | Rating → 70
 Download → SMS NAG1215 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

UNLESS YOU HAVE BEEN living under a rock or away from what would be considered advanced civilisation, you'd recognise *Ratatouille* as animation studio Pixar's latest hit movie. Thus, inevitably, there would be a game for it, especially a mobile one. But unlike past games based on Pixar's movies, this one is pretty hard. In fact, for a mobile game in general, it's pretty hard. You need to play the tutorial a few times to get a grip on things – and even then it's a test of endurance and memory.

The point of the game is to cook. Standing in the kitchen, you wait for orders to come in, then you have to prepare them before the customer gets annoyed and leaves. Fortunately you can prepare multiple dishes at a time, but it takes a while to get used to the control scheme and rather baffling ingredients. Eventually you do and – providing you like the game's fast pace – this is a lot of fun. But it does seem to miss the demographic it's being aimed at. If your kid can play this, he or she must be pretty special. So, a nice try, but should mobile games really be this demanding? NAG

Walt Pretorius

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GAMES



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LIFESTYLE



REVIEWS

HEROES

Publisher → Gameloft | Genre → Action/Adventure | Reviewed on → Sony Ericsson K800i | Rating → 80
 Download → SMS NAG1211 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

A GAME BASED ON THIS very popular TV series was inevitable. The fact that a game was made for mobile may once have been surprising, but the truth is that mobile gaming is starting to be taken seriously. So it's small wonder that a valuable license like *Heroes* appears as a mobile game, which is a very accessible format for anyone who owns a decent cellphone.

The *Heroes* mobile game is very similar to a number of other action-adventure titles available on mobile. However, it features a variety of missions and objectives that set it apart from most games in that particular genre. Playing as Nikki, the woman with super human strength, for example, means a lot of fighting. Playing as Hiro, the time-bending Japanese character, results in stealthy, timing-based puzzle style levels. And, of course, each of the characters the player gets to use (and there are quite a few)

has a unique superpower, which can be activated in the game when the player has accumulated enough energy to do so.

The game takes on a sort of side-scrolling format, although it's not a platformer. Additionally, side-scrolling isn't the most accurate description, because it will scroll in whatever direction it needs to during the levels... up, down and in both left and right directions.

Heroes brings a nice level of variety to the table, and is a fairly satisfying game. There are a lot of "cuts" in the game, which feature text dialogue. Some of these feel a little forced and unnecessary, but they don't detract overly much.

The game is a nice homage to the popular series, and fans may get a kick out of it. It does a bit to stand out from the increasingly crowded mobile game market and is worth playing. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



JUICED 2

Publisher → THQ Wireless | Genre → Racing
 Reviewed on → Sony Ericsson K800i | Rating → 80
 Download → SMS NAG1216 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

RACING GAMES ON THE mobile platform are always fun, particularly now that 3D (or sort-of 3D) games are available for play. They tend to be very simplified, which is fine, and don't require much from the user.

Juiced 2 is a little more complex than most, which makes for a nice change. The player can collect a number of cars, all of which can be modified fairly extensively for a mobile title. These cars are then raced in various locations. The background graphics are very sparse, but the cars themselves are very well modelled.

Controlling the cars is a little more involved than just steering – the player will need to make use of brakes to initialise drifts for the tighter corners in order to progress further than the first four levels. Although there are different challenges, the game dynamic doesn't change much between the different race types. No matter, because it's good fun any which way. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



THE WEAKEST LINK 2008

Publisher → I-Play | Genre → Quiz
 Reviewed on → Motorola KRZR | Rating → 85
 Download → SMS NAG1214 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

THE WEAKEST LINK is certainly appealing for more than one reason. You might like it for the host's sarcastic comments. You might like the devious and nasty player votes that tend to target the opponents rather than the weak. Or perhaps you just like a really good quiz. The former two aren't entirely present here – interaction with the host is limited and you have to answer all the questions instead of everyone taking a turn. But if you want to test your knowledge and gamble on whether you should bank or not, this is just what you've been wanting to play.

Despite the lack of some of the show's key elements, it's still essentially *The Weakest Link* and it will have you bright-eyed with all of its glitz and polish. The questions aren't all that easy, either, so this makes for a good brain-teaser to try out on your lunch break. Granted, the game could really have been called something else – *The Weakest Link* is just a good jacket – but it all comes together nicely. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

HARDWARE

MOTOROLA KRZR K1

Supplier → Motorola | RRP → TBA



SPECS

SCREEN SIZE	176 x 220 pixels
COLOUR DEPTH	262,144 colour TFT
BATTERY STANDBY	300 hours
INTERNAL MEMORY	20MB
SIZE	103mm x 42mm x 16 mm

MAY MOTOROLA PHONES LIVE a long and happy brand life. I have to confess something: I love the newer generation of Motorola phones that started with the RAZR. It was purely on the whim of a contract upgrade and perusing the list of phones to see what I could get that brought me to it. I mainly liked that the RAZR used standard USB/mini-USB to do its data transfers. That kind of common sense should resonate through the rest of the phone – and it did. Now, a few years down the line a new phone is inevitable, so I settled for another Motorola. I didn't get the new RAZR, but I did get this slightly different model.

Interface-wise, there isn't much difference. Motorola's interface design resonates the same comfort of Nokia's phones and clearly has been tested well. As with the RAZR, the KRZR's SMS

functions are brilliant, as is the MP3 support. The screen is also large and vibrant, while the keypad is responsive and easy to feel your way around. Finally, a 2-megapixel camera, USB charge/data jack and Bluetooth rounds it off. All and all another solid model from Motorola.

As far as games go, it's pretty powerful and goes along with what's thrown at it. My main, possibly only, irritation is that the KRZR doesn't appear to support direct file transfers to its internal memory – it doesn't appear as a new drive device in Windows as the RAZR did. For that I apparently need the extra memory card (standard miniSD), but until I do, loading custom wallpapers and ringtones isn't an option. That's a step down, but for the rest it's a tough, powerful phone. Another win for Motorola in the casual market. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

MOBILE

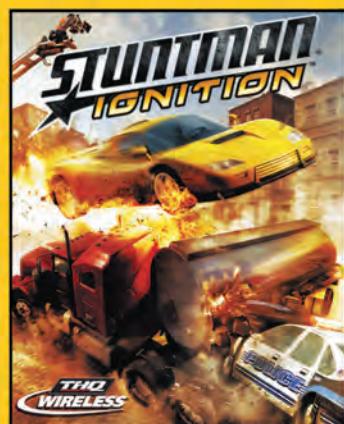


STUNTMAN IGNITION



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Game Cost R50
Standard SMS rates apply.



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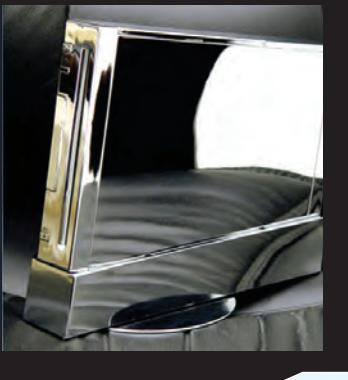
ALL I WANT FOR XMAS



CHRISTMAS IS A TIME FOR GIVING, NO MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN THE END. ACTUALLY, IT'S THE SEASON OF TAKING, OF GAMBLING, OF SHEER ANXIETY BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO SPEND A LOT OF MONEY BUYING OTHER PEOPLE CRAP AND GET REWARDED WITH CRAP AS WELL. THE ONLY TIME YOU GET WHAT YOU WANT IS IF YOU ARE AN ONLY CHILD AND YOU'VE BEEN NAGGING YOUR RELATIVES NON-STOP FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS. THEN YOU STILL GET SOCKS. SO IN AN ATTEMPT TO KEEP THE WRITERS HAPPY AND MAKE SURE THEY STOP SENDING THREATENING MESSAGES TO OLD MEN IN NORWAY, HERE ARE THEIR WISHES FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

MEGAN HUGHES

"What do you want for Christmas?" Ask that question at a beauty pageant and you'll be inundated with versions of the correct answer which all revolve around World Peace™ and an end to World Hunger™. Well, good for them. Personally I think all that is just a little overrated. If it wasn't for all the war and conflict on our planet, where would all the inspiration for our favourite strategy games come from? *Company of Heroes* and *Evil Genius* would never have existed if it weren't for corrupt governments and world terrorism. So the beauty queens can keep their World Peace™ and feed the starving crowds themselves. In the meantime, I'm hoping Santa brings me a Wii as well as all the best games to go with it. An early release for *Spore* is also somewhere near the top of my list, as is a few million bucks. (That would be rands, not the animals). Let's hope Santa comes through this year.



ADAM LIEBTAN

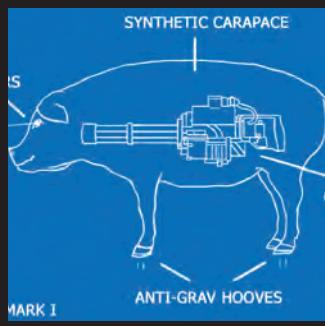
Given that [a] I don't belong to a faith that celebrates Christmas and [b] it's politically correct to call this time of year the "holiday season", please bear with me as I share my holiday wishlist with you. My proverbial stocking would ideally be stuffed with:

- * A South African health minister more concerned with patients' well-being than "allegedly" stealing their Rolexes
- * Stem-cell research
- * Laws keeping trucks off our highways between 6am and 6pm
- * Petrol price decreases
- * Three-day weekends

Of course, much of this is just very wishful thinking. I'm already quite fortunate in having very special people in my life who make every day happier and more bearable. All I really want to be happy during this silly season is to be with them, and to make sure they know how important they are to me. But Santa, if you're reading this, a hi-def TV wouldn't upset me too much.

**TARRYN VAN DER BYL**

I want a pony. But not, like, a pony pony. I want a biomechanical pony from the future, with cybernetic implants, lasers for eyes, side-mounted gatling guns, and anti-gravity hooves. And this pony should look a bit (actually, a lot) like a pig, because pigs → ponies. No wait, scrap that, I want an orbital weapons platform inside an asteroid-like Sludge Vohaul, only with an ion cannon instead of some gaudy star generator thing. Oh, but I suppose this galaxy-class fortress could probably make use of the mechapigs, so I'll reinstate that order. Obviously, autocratic sovereignty of the known and unknown universe is implied. I also want Mondays cancelled indefinitely, a permanent moratorium declared on annoying people, the ability to turn invisible at will, a portal gun, and *Guitar Hero III*.



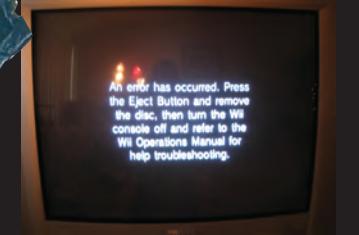
EDDIE FRANCIS

All I want for Xmas is a steering wheel and three TVs for playing *Forza* multi-screen. A new *Deathtrack* and *Need for Speed*. What would be nice is a Wii and a screen so wide to keep my girlfriend occupied while I spend my time surfing around on my new laptop. And throw in a bike and a brand new car, then maybe I would be alright. Please, oh please, a comfy couch. Mine hurts my back and is full of lice. But most important, a must-have item: a new cupboard for those ties and socks I know are gonna be sent. And maybe more people who'll save the planet for me. But when all is said and all is done, a winning lotto ticket would be most fun.



MIKTAR DRACON

Naturally, there is a large bucket of games I'd love to get for Xmas. But in all honesty, there are only two things that would punctuate the end of the festive season quite nicely for me: a working Nintendo Wii and a working Xbox 360. My annoying penchant for being a gaming early-adopter means that I imported my Wii and 360 from the US - which in turn gives me access to a lot of games before they are released locally, simply due to the NTSC versions of games often being released before the European/South African PAL versions. But, as with most early-adoption, you stand prey to the initial hardware flaws. Both the early Wii and 360 units suffer from heat problems - the Wii suffers a graphics card chipset failure which leads to console death, and the 360 suffers the motherboard heat warping failure which leads to Red Ring of console Death. Both my systems are on the brink of failure, that makes Miktar a very Sad Panda. Simply replacing the units with local PAL versions sucks, because that locks out my entire game library for them. Getting NTSC replacement units is, as most people know, very difficult. Ah well - so it goes.



JUSTIN SLABBERT

What do I want for Christmas? Not much, but if possible, I want world peace and the end of our hunger problem. Well, okay, so that is the standard bunch of junk people normally write about when asked. So if you must really know, I want my very own lightsaber in a golden or purple hue. It must work, because how else will I be able to exact my wrath upon those evil-doers who diss my reviews? After that, I want the all new 8800 GT graphics card. Actually, I want two of those so that I could link them together. I also want super powers! Just give me one, like Peter Petrelli's Mimicry ability. I'll do the rest!! Also, I want R1 from everyone in South Africa just so that I know they appreciate me. With this money I collect I will be able to buy some land in which I plan to build my own Fortress of Solitude, but then it must come with super powers! Okay, fine, just give me a cookie and be done with it.

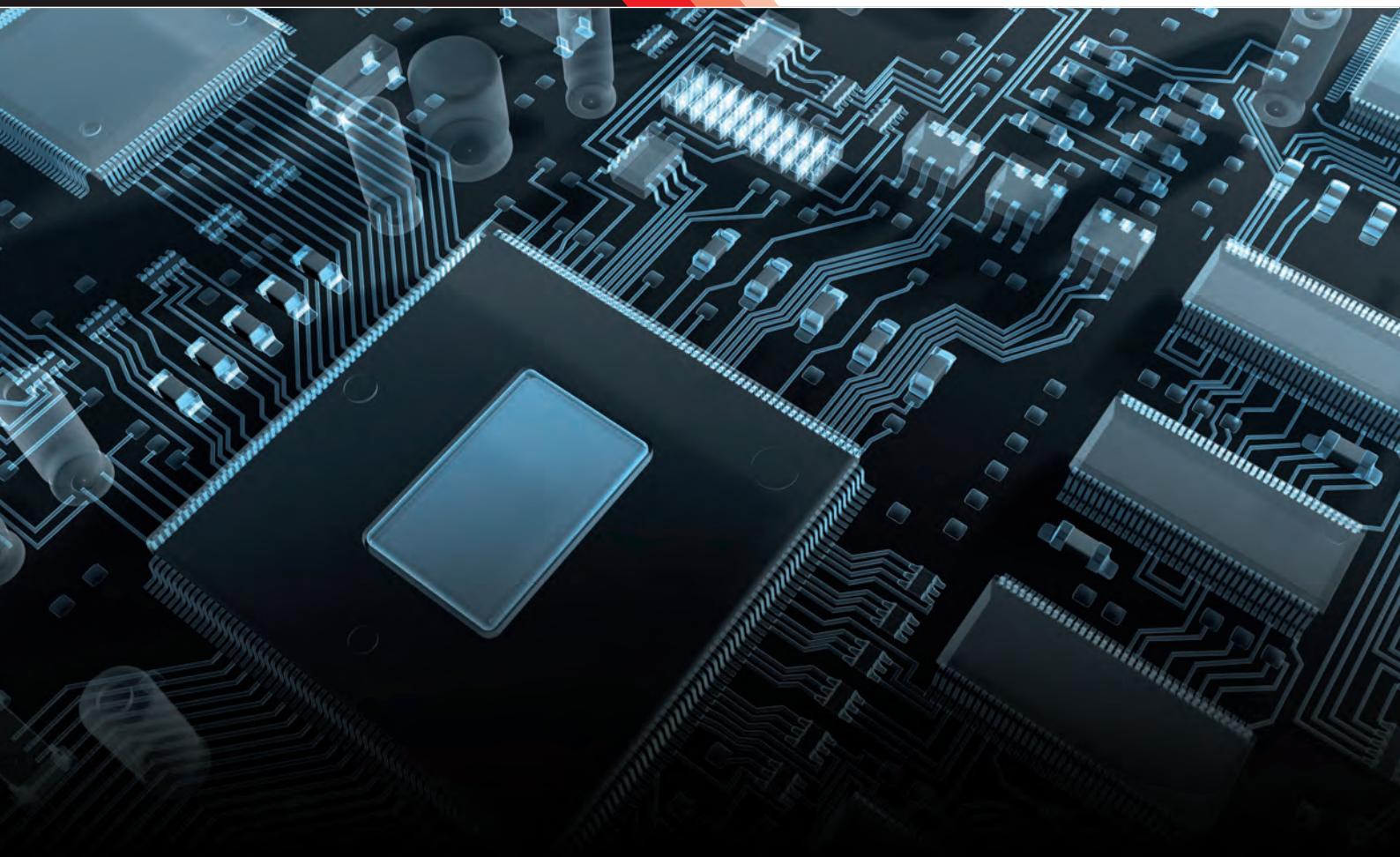
**JAMES FRANCIS**

I'm still on the kick for an island an a reasonably-sized nuclear bomb. That aside, I want global warming to end so that I don't have to hear the term "carbon footprint" again. Actually, if that requires the destruction of everything I'm good as well. Basically, can someone ban the latest buzzword on the block? Other than that, can we finally get *Grand Theft Auto IV*? I promise I will ask for nothing else. But if I don't get it... **NAG**



Figures from McFarlane's TwistedChristmas. Supplied by Cosmic Comics (011) 476-9640





OVERCLOCKING 104

WHETHER YOU'RE OVERCLOCKING AN AMD Phenom or Athlon 64, the principles behind memory tweaking will be the same. While you'll get better performance from the same settings on the Phenom than you would on the Athlon 64, the settings that benefit the Athlon 64 should do the same for the Phenom.

DDR2 memory is in its golden age right now, as performance is encroaching on DDR3 speeds. But the timings are DDR2. So achieving 12GB/sec in memory bandwidth is not impossible but feasible even for 24/7 use. The key, as stated last issue, is to keep the timings as tight as possible. Forget about 1T for now, but keep the timings as tight as possible starting at 800MHz and moving forward. This shouldn't take too much effort because many sets of high-performance DDR2 800MHz can achieve 3-3-3-9 2T at the 900MHz mark. As before, let's assume that we are making use of a 13x multiplier CPU, which gives us a 2.6GHz clock. If we drop this multiplier to 12x but increase the HT frequency to 217MHz, the RAM should now be set to 868MHz. At 3-3-3-8/9, the bandwidth efficiency should be above the 75% mark, which is fantastic as that gives 10.4GB/sec... Increasing the efficiency much more than this will be a little tough and the only real way to achieve this is to increase the multiplier to 14x, which gives 3.03GHz on the CPU clock.

This is easy to reach in particular with JH-F3 stepping CPUs and the newer ones. The memory speed is going to stay the same, but the efficiency is now increased to above the 80% mark, which is just over the 11.1GB/sec mark. However, this will only be possible if the controller in your specific CPU can tolerate such settings at this CPU speed. Assuming all is going right at the moment, the next step is tweaking the HT speed to reach the maximum CPU speed (but make sure you don't go too far over the RAM limits). A safe limit for air-cooled JH-F3 CPUs will be 3.2GHz. So, the HT speed needs to be set at 228MHz. This will increase your RAM speed to 912MHz, which is asking a lot from any set of RAM except for high-end modules. If you are lucky enough to own such a set, your memory bandwidth efficiency should have increased to 82%. That might not be much at all, but you should keep in mind that the operating frequency has increased as well. The measured bandwidth should be 11.9GB/sec - close to the 12GB/sec mark where you want to be. To get over this limit, the CPU will have to clock a little higher or 1T will be necessary. However, the chances of being able to run 1T at those timings are slim, so the CPU speed will have to increase.

Should you decide to stop at this point, this



will be the highest efficiency you can get for the RAM at the given frequency. Relaxing the timings to 4-4-4-9/12 will change everything, and while this will allow the RAM to clock that much higher, the speed gained may not be enough to offset what you lose by decreasing the CPU speed. For that to work, the CPU has to have a lot more overclocking headroom, and even then your efficiency may drop to the mid-60s, meaning that you end up with the same bandwidth as with the above settings but only at much higher RAM and HT speeds, causing unnecessary strain on the system. The balance between the CPU, RAM speeds and timings on the AMD platform is very delicate and can get very involved, but this should be a rough guide on how to go about it. Next time we give memory a break and move on to operating system tweaks.

NAG
Neo Sibeko



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SA OVER CLOCKING LEAGUE 3600

WITH SO MANY HARDWARE ADVANCEMENTS OVER THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS, THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER OR EASIER TIME TO GET INTO THE OC SCENE. MOST CPUS THESE DAYS ARE CAPABLE OF HITTING THE 3GHZ MARK, DDR2 MEMORY PRICES HAVE TAKEN A NOSEDIVE, AND GRAPHICS POWER HAS INCREASED. SO WHY NOT PUT YOUR SYSTEM TO THE TEST AND SEE HOW IT COMPARES TO THE COMPETITION? RULES CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.SYSTEMSHOCK.CO.ZA/FORUMS UNDER THE OC & TWEAKING SECTION, AND SCORES SHOULD BE SUBMITTED THERE AS WELL. THESE WERE THE HIGHEST SCORES AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT:

AQUAMARK 3

1. Trax - 213,892
2. UncleBob - 209,985
3. Zenith - 207,508
4. Gouhan - 206,217
5. ColonelDebugger - 205,452

3DMARK2001 SE

1. UncleBob - 69,299
2. Zenith - 67,689
3. Trax - 67,264
4. ColonelDebugger - 64,984
5. rra - 64,975

3DMARK03 (BUILD 360)

1. UncleBob - 50,102
2. ColonelDebugger - 45,556
3. Trax - 44,270
4. rra - 42,981
5. VoodooProphetII - 41,829

3DMARK05

1. rra - 21,901
2. UncleBob - 21,817
3. ColonelDebugger - 20,962
4. Shogan85 - 20,383
5. Deezil - 20,328

3DMARK06

1. rra - 14,207
2. UncleBob - 14,147
3. ColonelDebugger - 12,935
3. silencer - 12,305
4. Nones - 9,235

SUPERPI 1M

1. rra - 13,890
2. Trax - 13,891
3. UncleBob - 13,984
4. Deezil - 14,000
5. ColonelDebugger - 14,032

SUPERPI 32M

1. Trax - 13:08:625
2. rra - 13:32:391
3. ColonelDebugger - 13:58:906
4. Deezil - 14:00:531
5. UncleBob - 14:08:781

SISOFWARE SANDRA 2008

1. Anakha56 - 11,349MB/sec
2. Gouhan - 9,674MB/sec
3. Trax - 9,663MB/sec
4. RRA - 9,373MB/sec
5. Zenith - 9,186MB/sec

GLOBAL RANKINGS

1. UncleBob - 56 points
2. rra - 55 points
3. Trax - 48 points
4. ColonelDebugger - 42 points
5. Deezil - 27 points
6. Zenith - 19 points
7. Gouhan - 15 points
8. VoodooProphetII - 14 points
9. Anakha56 - 10 points
10. Nones - 5 points **NAG**

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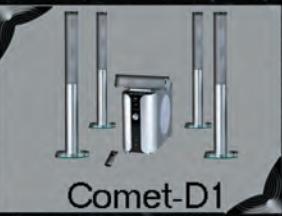


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Titan-717



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Titan-777



Xforce-2



Xforce-3



GROUND ZERO

by Toby Hudon

SERVER CRASH

THIS MONTH HAS BEEN rather fun here at NAG – at least for me, because the server crashed. While for many this would be just a nuisance, for myself, who's tasked with keeping the server functioning, it's been a bit more than that.

Basically, we had too many drives failing in the RAID 6 in the same timeframe. The odds of two more drives failing while one is out for a month is around $(MTBF / (30 * 24))^2$, or 2,778,889 to 1. But that doesn't really sit well with people and since it's significantly less probable than common excuses like "struck by lightning", the official explanation management is going with is, "The Tooth Fairy came in the night and hit it with a hammer", which is probably about right.

So, sometimes when life gives you lemons, you go "Ewww! Lemons!" and give them to your husband who actually likes sour things while you walk down to the petrol station to buy a bottle of Coke. Other times you keep playing with the lemons trying to remember how to build one of those clocks where you stick a copper nail in the one side and a zinc one in the other, and then suddenly you go, "This is stupid, I already have a clock that doesn't leak", and life moves on.

But such things are distracting, and can keep me too preoccupied to come up with a coherent column on a pertinent topic; so this month is probably going to be mostly rambling and gibberish. I suppose I could rant on about unfair distributor pricing, but that's old and they haven't done anything fresh and offensive recently. Maybe I could say something about AMD's choices for press events, considering the last one was in Hell Tunisia, and they've just asked me to go to a new one in Warsaw, Poland – in mid-November. I guess they got tired of waiting for the last place to freeze over.

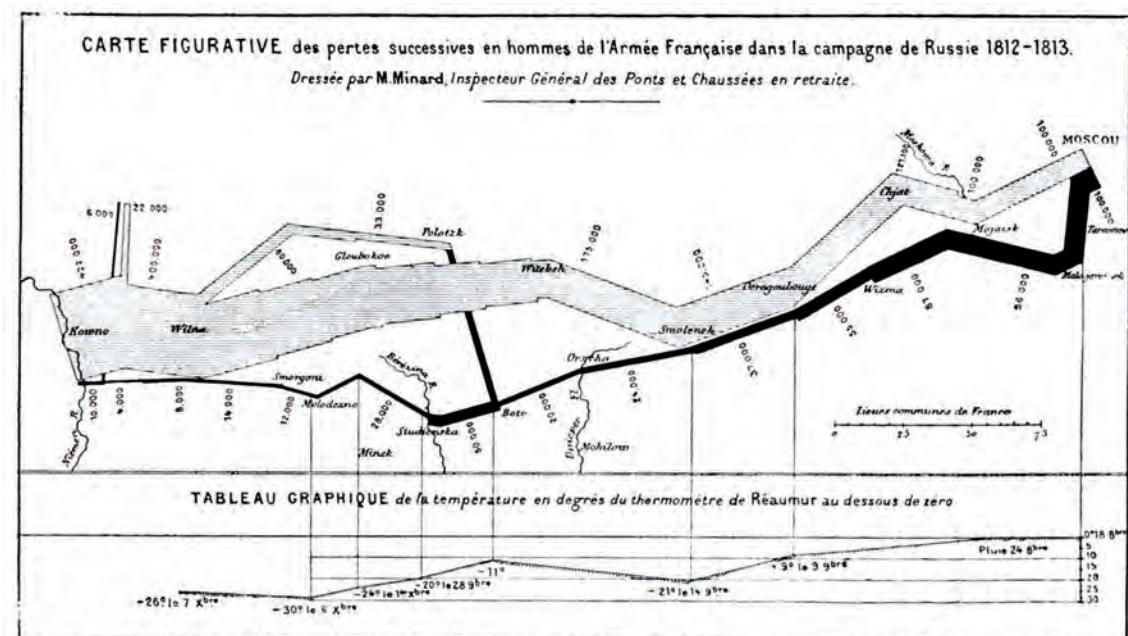
I could probably Godwin my own column right now with a comment about marching on Russia in winter. But Napoleon was dumb enough to try it too (see chart), and the analogy probably doesn't work in the age of modern warfare and when applied to the semiconductor industry. Then again, considering AMD's direction in the face of what Intel's position now looks like, maybe it does. There's more to strategy than just "Nuh-uh, we're

still better!" guys – you need to consider another angle like you did back in the K6 days.

Normally I'd consider going to this kind of event so I could take a break from all the fast-paced Website reading where I'll probably hear about whatever they're "secretly" announcing before I would if I were actually at the event. But less than two weeks notice is too short and we have deadlines to meet around here. Plus they'll probably give all the free samples to important people like Croatian Websites again while mumbling something about SA or NAG not being the target market or whatever. But don't worry, I'm sure in two or three months we'll get one to look at for a week before we have to give it back, since they're scarce in the market (everyone in Europe gets to keep their half a dozen free samples).

On a more positive note, I've been playing more games lately. Even on the PS3 now that we actually have a review unit (*Stardust HD* is awesome)! I know some people like to accuse us of being anti-PS3, but that's not true. The games for it just usually suck. Maybe I should do a feature on why this is so. It has to do with the 360's development process being along the lines of "Click checkbox, compile for 360 instead of PC", while the PS3's process is more akin to herding cats that are on methamphetamine and fire. But it's just so busy here at the end of the year and I barely have time to do (or remember) the things I'm already supposed to be doing (like columns). So, that may have to wait a bit.

Hopefully next year we'll have less server meltdowns and more game time. But probably not much of *Hellgate*, since they've decided that LAN play is too much of a threat and everyone should fork out \$60 for a demo of a game they can then rent for \$15/month. We all know that adding LAN support would make it easy to crack and games are about security, not entertainment. I'm sure this move will completely deter all piracy and attempts at cracked servers since people who can't have something shiny just give up and walk away rather than resent it and destroy it just to spite you, right? **NAG**



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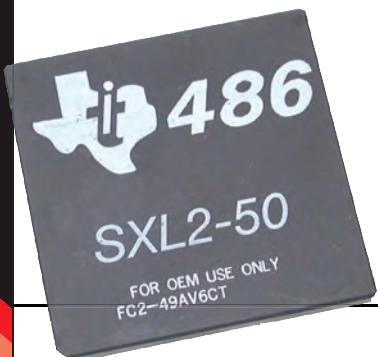


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HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

THE MID RANGE IS BACK

WE ALL KNOW IT. The mid-range parts since the 6600 GT of 2004 have been disappointing. While the GeForce 7600 and Radeon X1600 were worthwhile successors to the new-found performance in mid-range parts, the DX10 equivalents took a step backwards relative to their high-end parts.

One of the major things that we lamented was the 128-bit memory bus, still employed by the 8600 GTS and the 2600XT. No matter how high the memory frequency is, the paper-thin bit-width has run its course. It is something that should have already stopped a generation back, but it didn't and we ended up with the sadness that is the 8600 and 2600.

Between AMD and NVIDIA, they attempted to remedy this by scaling down high-end parts such as the 8800 GTS 320MB and the HD2900PRO. However, while attractive in pricing, the GeForce was never cheap enough and the HD2900PRO was very late. Besides, scaling from the top downwards never quite works because in essence (at least for the IHWs) you still have roughly the same cost (making it impossible for the products to hit the right price points, which have not changed for years and are fixed at the sub-\$250 mark).

Luckily, the cheesiness that is the 8600 and 2600 series is no longer the only option for those on a budget. We now have the new 8800 GT and the HD2950-class graphics parts, which are worth getting excited about. It's almost as if these two IHWs knew their mid-range parts left a lot to be desired. So, they are finally releasing products that will compete against each other for everything that counts and not how

slow they can be.

These new parts feature refined cores, are more elegant than their predecessors, and are even in some cases faster than their more expensive family members. This is what the mid range has always been about: tweaking and extracting the most from the high-end parts, but making them more affordable. With these two, the mid range is back after being absent for far too long.

The 8800 GT is a marvel as it brings the best of the G84 to the G80. Clock for clock, cycle for cycle, the G84 is quicker than the G80, but this didn't show in the disappointing 8600 series. So, NVIDIA has scaled it up to a full 112 stream processors, given it a die shrink and more bandwidth to play with. All of this has resulted in a GPU that is faster than the 8800 GTS 640MB and sometimes even faster than the 8800 GTX. Even more so, the 8800 GT consumes less power, runs much cooler, is a single-slot design and is half the price of the 8800 GTS 640MB. This is the true successor of the 6600 GT - everything else in between has been passable and okay at best.

AMD has to the same degree (if not a little more) pulled out all the stops with the RV670. The 55nm node itself makes it far superior to the R600 core in cycle efficiency, and also results in an ultra-cool, single-slot, single-power connector card that performs much like the HD2900PRO and is sometimes faster than the HD2900XT. What these two IHWs were doing all this time with the 8600 and 2600 will remain a mystery to many. These new products may cost a little bit more, but they are much faster and in every single discipline better products than anything else in both product ranges. **NAG**





imagine speed and simplicity that inspire

Introducing the irresistible new camcorder collection from Samsung. The HMX10 records in ultra-smooth 50fps HD progressive video for memories that rival reality. The DX10 lets you shoot, edit, and burn from flash memory to DVDs for easy sharing without any external power supply. The MX10 is the ultimate go-anywhere camcorder in your choice of three fashionable colors. And all three have flash memory for silent, shock-resistant, and instant recording. Swivel handgrips for ergonomic high- and low- angle shooting. In-camera editing to save time and storage space. Plus many other features to make your memories even more memorable. With the new flash memory camcorders from Samsung, it's not that hard to imagine.



KEYBOARDS ROUNDUP

IN RACING, IT'S KNOWN THAT ALL THE HORSEPOWER, TORQUE, AND ACCELERATION ARE USELESS UNLESS YOU CAN APPLY IT: A CAR IS ONLY AS FAST AS ITS TYRES LET IT BE. IN PC GAMING, THERE IS A SIMILAR ISSUE. HAVING ALL THE GRAPHICAL POWER AND CPU SPEED MONEY CAN BUY IS USELESS IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL THE SYSTEM THE WAY YOU WANT TO. SO, INPUT DEVICES ARE AS CRITICAL TO GAMING AS TYRES ARE TO AN F1 CAR.

CHANCES ARE YOU'VE BEEN ON THE SAME KEYBOARD FOR PROBABLY A FEW LAPS TOO MANY. MAYBE YOU'VE JUST WORN IT DOWN OR MAYBE THE NEWER FEATURES OF MODERN GAMING-CENTRIC KEYBOARDS ARE BEGINNING TO ENTICE YOU. IN EITHER CASE, WE'VE TAKEN A LOOK AT SOME OF THE LATEST BOARDS ON THE MARKET, BOTH FOR GAMING AND NOT, BUT WITH AN EYE FOR GAMING PERFORMANCE AS THE MAIN FACTOR.

MERC STEALTH

Supplier → Frontosa | Website → www.frontosa.co.za | RRP → R940



FIRST UP IS THE new MERC Stealth. This keyboard may look a tad similar to the ZBoard, since it comes from the same company. Unlike the ZBoard, the Stealth doesn't have interchangeable layouts. Instead, it has a separate set of keys designed for FPS use, which duplicate keys on the keyboard so you can still use it for regular typing.

The idea is interesting, but in practice, our impressions of it were rather mixed. The gaming key set uses a lot of variable sizes and position spacing, so it can be difficult to hit the

key you're looking for. Some retraining time may fix this, but it's also a bit of a stretch for those with smaller hands. Our larger-handed testers seemed to enjoy the board quite a bit, but the rest found that the wide WASD keys meant a long stretch to the neighbours on either side, and the slight angle caused a lot of misses and wrong keys hit.

Still, the keyboard has a solid feel and looks like it could take a reasonable amount of pounding in a LAN bag. Whether or not it will improve your game is open to debate, but it's not going to be useful for those into games

other than FPS titles, to make space for the new keys, the number pad gets overloaded with other keys like Insert, Home, and Delete.

FEATURES

Three phase backlight
Choose level of brightness
Illuminated characters on every key

ENERMAX AURORA

Supplier → Frontosa | Website → www.frontosa.co.za | RRP → R774



ENERMAX IS A NAME more often seen on power supplies, so the appearance of a keyboard with their brand was a bit of a surprise. The Aurora seems like a compact board at first glance, but it is in fact full sized, and is quite comfortable to type on. It's basically similar to a laptop keyboard, with the short keystroke and soft touch that some people prefer over some of the more traditional desktop designs.

It's also made of metal, giving it a nice weight and impression of durability, and looks pretty nice as well. We didn't find

any real problems with the Aurora either in typing or gaming. If you're looking for something stylish and subtle that doesn't light up or look like it came out of a B-grade sci-fi movie, this is a nice option.

Despite the short key throw, we found the feedback to be quite good and we didn't have any issues with keys registering when we didn't want them to or not registering when we did. It also has a very standard spacing, so there isn't really any adjustment period to worry about. Response was good in games, so those worried about the fact

that it's a laptop-like keyboard (meaning it's for typing and can't handle the demands of games such as fast response or multiple key presses) have nothing to fear.

FEATURES

Compact design
Metal construction
2 x USB ports
Pass-through audio and mic

RAZER PRO|TYPE

Supplier → Frontosa | Website → www.frontosa.co.za | RRP → R1,128



ANOTHER NAME NOT COMMONLY found on keyboards would be Razer, although they'd probably be thought of before Enermax since it seems like a reasonable expansion from their successful lines of mice. So, it's not a huge surprise to see a keyboard product coming from Razer. Seeing one in Apple white with an integrated iPod dock is a bit more of one though.

Trying to identify the flaw in the Razer Pro|Type is a bit difficult. It seems quite subtle - some nebulous issue about it not having the right 'feel' or other unspecific sense of malaise. After a lot of careful scrutiny, we found that the most likely culprit is the shape of the keys. You may notice that many keyboard manufacturers tend to sculpt their keys such that the centre

is a bit lower than the rest, like the Logitech G15. This is common on desktop keyboards. However, most laptop keyboards don't have this. They tend to have keys with flat surfaces, like the Enermax Aurora. Also, most desktop keyboards tend to have a wider spacing between keys, whereas laptop boards tend to put them almost touching, although sometimes there's a bit of a bevel around the edges.

The problem is that the Pro|Type has desktop-shaped keys with laptop spacing and feel. This means that when you slide your fingers from D to F, instead of the key edge bumping against the centre of your finger so the side slides over the gap to the next key, the Razer keys actually catch the side of your

finger on the destination key's leading edge and drags. This results in a very irritating feel and poor response. It may seem like we're fishing for flaws here or nitpicking, but it really is a very disconcerting issue and multiple testers in the office all agreed that the keyboard "Just feels icky."

FEATURES

Apple white
iPod Dock
2 x USB ports
Media keys

LOGITECH G15

Supplier → Logitech | Website → www.logitech.co.za | RRP → R995



IN CONTRAST TO THE pattern of our previous few entries, Logitech is a brand most people would associate with keyboards. It's no surprise to see a gaming keyboard from them considering their peripheral line-up and what they've done with their gaming mice. The G15 is well known in gaming circles by now and is pretty much the contender to beat in this roundup.

The G15 is a pricey board, no doubt about it, but it comes with features that are actually worth something. Apart from LCD, which is nifty but not all that life changing, it's the other features like the 18 extra G-keys, the programmable macro sets, and the ability of the driver to change macro

sets depending on what game it detects is running and apply the right one (even when you Alt-Tab), that set it apart. Want to disable the Windows key so you don't crash out? There's a switch for that! Need to lower your volume? There's a jog wheel right in the middle. Everything you'd expect is there plus things you wouldn't, and the G15 is a great package that's worth the money.

If there's a downside to the G15, it's that it doesn't prop itself up very high with the feet extended (not a huge issue) and it doesn't use the buckling spring technology of ancient IBM keyboards. But then, neither does any other board in this review, so we can't really fault Logitech for it. The keys

still have a decent travel and punch with a good shape and spacing that feels pretty natural. Typing at high speed and gaming are both fine, and the extra keys and macros make this board a dream for MMO fans.

FEATURES

- Customisable LCD display
- 18 'G' keys for programming
- Macro support
- Automatic per-game profile switching
- Volume wheel and media controls
- Hard-switch Windows key deactivation
- Backlight with variable brightness

MERC ZBOARD

Supplier → Frontosa | Website → www.frontosa.co.za | RRP → R437



THE ZBOARD HAS BEEN around in the local gaming scene for some time now. It's an innovative design, a keyboard with modular sets that you can change for specific games by replacing the top of the keyboard. It comes with a standard keyboard layout plus one for FPS use, which has a set of bright red keys on the left as part of an altered layout on the left third of the board.

The ZBoard's FPS layout is similar to the MERC Stealth we looked at earlier, except that it's replaceable and not rotated at an offset to the rest of the keys. Surprisingly, this seems to

make it more comfortable, not less (perhaps because of less of a need for retraining than the version with the keypad set at an angle). But it still makes use of oddly shaped and positioned keys, which can be frustrating to those expecting a normal keyboard.

As for the replaceable key sets, they're roughly analogous to the things you would stick on your keyboard to identify keys back in the 1980s, but they cost ten times more. If you're the kind of person who constantly looks at your keyboard, these may be nice, but for those who do things by touch,

they're probably more frustrating than anything else if they've changed any key shapes or positions.

FEATURES

- Interchangeable keyboard layouts
- Media keys
- 2 x USB ports

MICROSOFT NATURAL ERGONOMIC KEYBOARD 4000

Supplier → Axiz | Website → www.axiz.co.za | RRP → R399



WELL, HERE'S A NAME that may be more familiar to many - the Microsoft (un)Natural Keyboard. The keyboard with the weird shape is back again, with its new iteration numbered 4000. This version has some minor improvements such as having

F-keys work normally by default unlike the last iteration. But overall, it's still the oddly shaped keyboard it's been since the mid-90s, and just as awkward for gaming.

While the Natural Keyboard may have been designed for improved typing

ergonomics (which is debatable given the variation in hand sizes and postures), it can be frustrating for gaming on due to the odd layout. The alterations are three-dimensional, so it's not just a matter of keys being shifted slightly. With some training, it's possible that this keyboard could be useful for gaming, but it will likely cause a lot of frustration first.

The madness doesn't just end with the keys themselves; the board comes with some kind of heel on the end that actually slopes it down as opposed to a neutral or (the preferred) upward slant. There is probably some anatomical or medical justification for this, but we feel that the psychological damage caused by the frustration of the shape may not justify it.

FEATURES

- 'Ergonomic' shape
- Media keys
- Alternate Windows function keys
- Zoom slider
- Negative angle support

MICROSOFT WIRELESS ENTERTAINMENT DESKTOP 7000

Supplier → Axiz | Website → www.axiz.co.za | RRP → R1,399



FOR THOSE WHO THINK that bash at the (un)Natural Keyboard is due to an anti-Microsoft bias, you'll be surprised by what we have to say about this one. The Wireless Entertainment Desktop 7000 (Can't MS come up with a product name with less than four parts?) is awesome. If you're looking to show off, or just have a decent controller for a media PC, this is a solid contender.

While it's not exactly gaming-centric, it is quite sleek looking, and doubly so if you're running Windows Vista, where some of the extra keys like the Gadgets key will come into play more often. It does have a curve to

it, but only on one axis, and the keys have no split between them, so we can forgive that. It also has a four-way scroll in the upper right that changes to a touch pad with the flick of a switch (useful if you don't want to carry the accompanying mouse along).

The wireless part of the deal comes in the form of Bluetooth, which works via the supplied USB dongle. We had no problems setting the keyboard up - it was quick and easy. Unlike many wireless parts, the response time was quite good and we couldn't really tell if it was any slower than a standard wired keyboard. It also has a decent wireless range. As for battery

life, we didn't manage to run it down with just a couple of days of gaming and office work, so we're reasonably confident a fresh set will get you through an entire LAN. **NAG**

FEATURES

- Bluetooth
- Vista-specific keys
- Touch pad/four-way scroll
- Media keys

NAG'S DREAM MACHINE

For our first edition of the Dream Machine, we have a brand-new 45nm quad-core CPU and the Lian Li PC-V2000B Plus II, a case as imposing as its name. You'll find them both in this issue along with the Logitech G15, which dominated our keyboard roundup. Now, just because you see one hard drive or graphics card there, doesn't mean we use just one. If you're not considering RAID, CrossFire, or SLI, you don't belong here. Yes, the Saitek GM3200 was imported – deal. If we can do it so can you. Our philosophy is "Go big or go home", so you may need to hit the gym to carry the machine and 26" LCD to a LAN; but that's your problem.

Intel QX9650
Intel Corporation
[011] 806-4530

Acer AL2623W 26" widescreen LCD
AXIZ
[011] 237-7000

Lian-Li PC-V2000B Plus II
Frontier Electronics
[011] 608-1809

Logitech G15
Logitech SA
[011] 656-3375

Zalman Reserator XT
Frontosa
[011] 466-0038

Gigabyte P35 DQ6
Rectron
[011] 203-1000

Saitek GM3200 Laser Mouse
The Prophecy Shop
[011] 888-5564

Silverstone Strider 1000W-ST1000
NakedIT
[011] 678-1288

ASUS EAH2900XT-G-HTVDI-512M
AXIZ
[011] 237-7000

Patriot DDR2 PC9200 1150
Syntech SA
[021] 593-0304

ASUS Xonar D2
AXIZ
[011] 237-7000

WD Caviar SE16
Drive Control
[011] 201-8927

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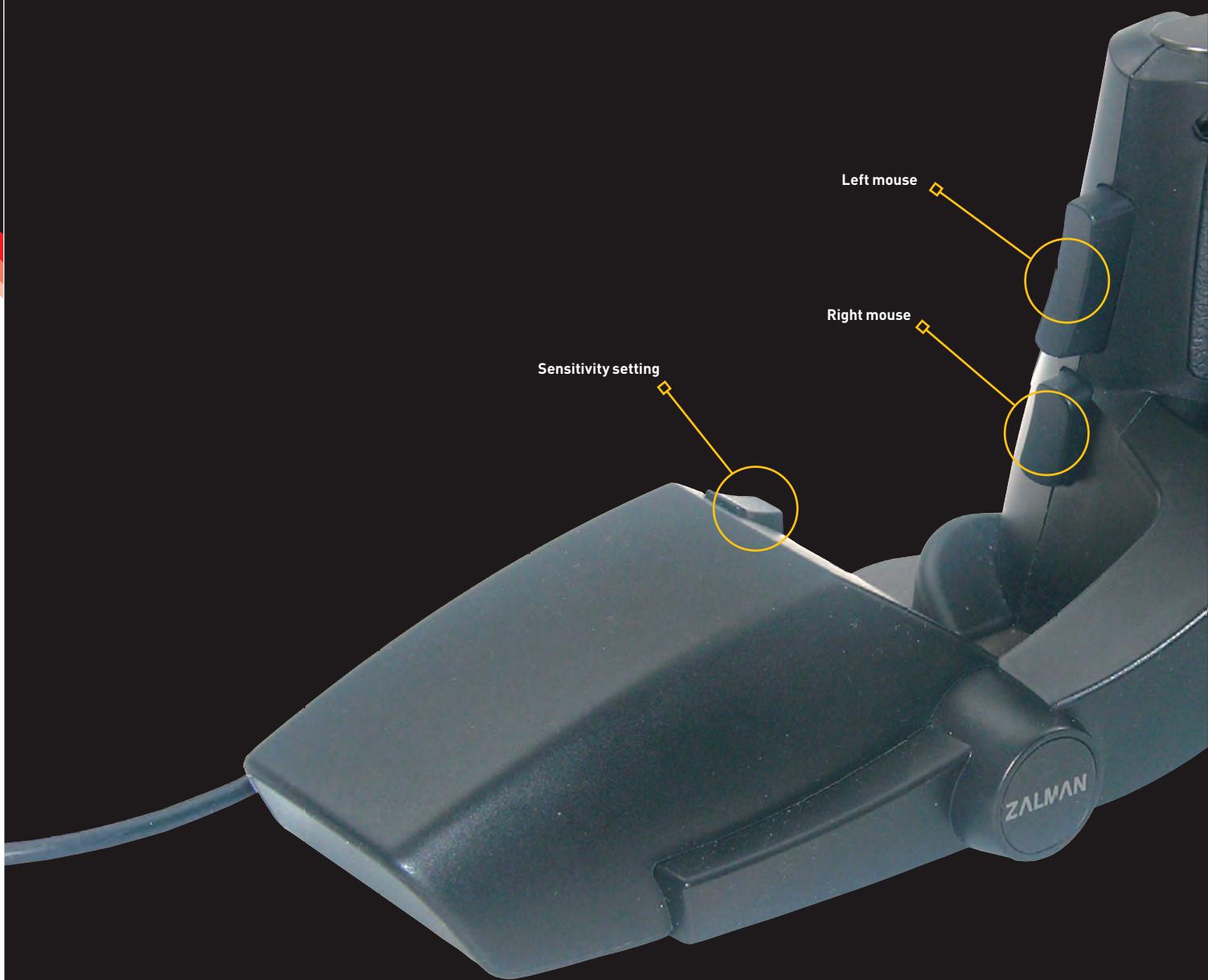
ADSL
from R49/mo



3G *new
from R114/mo



Hosting
from R19/mo



ZALMAN FPS GUN

IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO reinvent things, isn't it? That's the age we live in. The information age: reinvent the engine, the communications networks, reinvent yourself, and reinvent your tools...

It's this train of thought that leads to huge discoveries, letting us take massive strides forward. And it's this kind of thinking that led Zalman to create this: the FPS GUN. We know; that frontal area looks a lot like part of a *Star Wars* speeder. However, that's not all that makes it cool. The FPS GUN is a new pointing device, designed for the FPS gamer. Luckily we at NAG are FPS fans, so it's for us. Let's give it a whirl then!

It must be stressed that this is still a prototype unit for testing the market's response and whetting appetites a bit while refining the design. It looks great for a prototype: well finished and solid. It's also easy to install and worked with every FPS game we tried: *Stranglehold* (even though it's not an FPS), *BioShock*, and of course *Soldat*, *Quake III*, and *DoTA*.

Of course, the FPS GUN takes a few

minutes to get used to. The scroll wheel and five buttons (one for the index finger, one for the ring finger, and two thumb buttons) are well situated and easily accessible. There's a fifth button on the rear edge of the 'speeder' facing your hand for on-the-fly cycling between sensitivity levels, which you can only hit by extending one of your trigger fingers. The glow of the wheel changes colour as you cycle: red for fastest, light purple for slowest, and a fetching blue for in between. It's nicely contoured too and your hand fits comfortably. The useful little 'pinkie lip' is spot on whether your hand is large or small.

While gaming, we noticed the advantages - in the lateral plane - of having the light sensor slung all that way out in front of your actual point of motion. It enables wrist-flick aiming changes, although it in turn hampers your vertical movement speed. You have to push the unit away and pull it back towards you for the vertical axis, and you cannot really do this with your fingers alone - the whole arm needs to be used.

However, ignore this and in a sense it does

SPECS

BUTTONS	5
DPI	600, 1,200, 2,400
INTERFACE	USB
HAND	Right

work. You do feel that bit more engaged than with an average mouse, and your aim seems marginally improved (albeit very marginally). More importantly, it does feel good to be part of this revolution in input devices - holding something a bit different, a bit special. This as well as the visual intimidation factor could gain you a frag or two at a high-paced LAN. The FPS GUN would make an excellent icebreaker at social gaming events as well.

However, in the midst of all this pleasant escapism and gaming fantasy, there's something nagging at the back of my head. Some element struggling to penetrate the



HARDWARE

gaming euphoria, something out of place... Slowly my brain catches the message.

It's pain. Sharp wrist pains, in fact, after barely an hour of gun-toting violence. Right at the base of my wrist, where it's now forced to meet the edge of the table. All right, perhaps I wasn't sitting in the prescribed "best position" for using a keyboard and mouse. We're also supposed to stop playing every hour or so to give our eyes and brains a break and avoid stuff like epileptic attacks, right? How many of us actually do that?

However, ergonomically the FPS GUN has some flaws. When bending your wrist downwards to use a conventional mouse is how the wrist is most comfortably bent. In an up-down manner, your fingers control almost everything with small wrist motions aiding just as much as necessary.

Now, rotate your hand clockwise to about sixty degrees, and you have to use different muscles. See the fingers don't really have any muscles in them, rather they're actually cleverly connected via ligaments to muscles, which reside in the top and bottom of your forearm. Then there are a number of muscles in your "palm" area itself, which don't actually originate from any bone structure, which is odd.

Try this. Hold something heavy in your

hand, with your wrist locked straight in relation to your forearm. Pump a bit. Pretty easy, isn't it? Now try cocking your wrist laterally as far as you can and repeat the exercise. Much harder, isn't it? That's why the FPS GUN hurts your wrist.

Since your arm is already sloping downwards, away from your pointing device, turning the wrist to a more vertical base means that moving the pointing device will require exponentially more effort to accomplish. Therefore, the muscles will fatigue faster and start to ache much sooner than with a 'conventional' mouse, which keeps your wrist on a plane parallel to the ground – straight, in other words.

Still, we have to give Zalman credit for really trying hard with this one. They've certainly maintained their reputation as producers of high-quality peripherals, but the FPS GUN needs some more fine-tuning. There's no real rush since Zalman isn't the first with this type of concept anyway. A company called MonsterGecko made its PistolMouse FPS – shaped like a real gun and therefore no doubt slightly more comfortable – available last year already with limited success. Revolutionary changes often come about gradually through often-painful evolution, and the FPS GUN is a promising step. **NAG**

Russell Bennett



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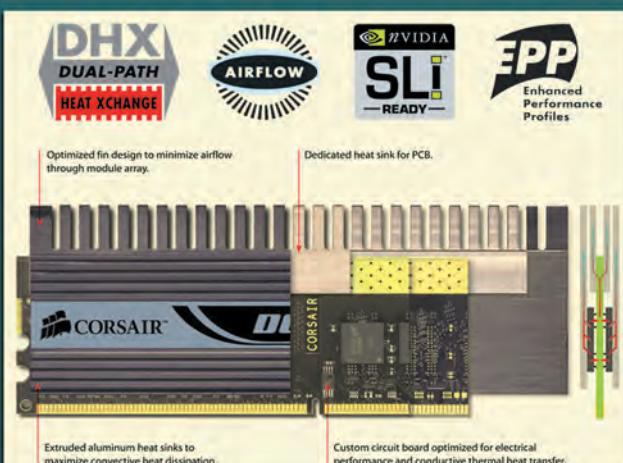
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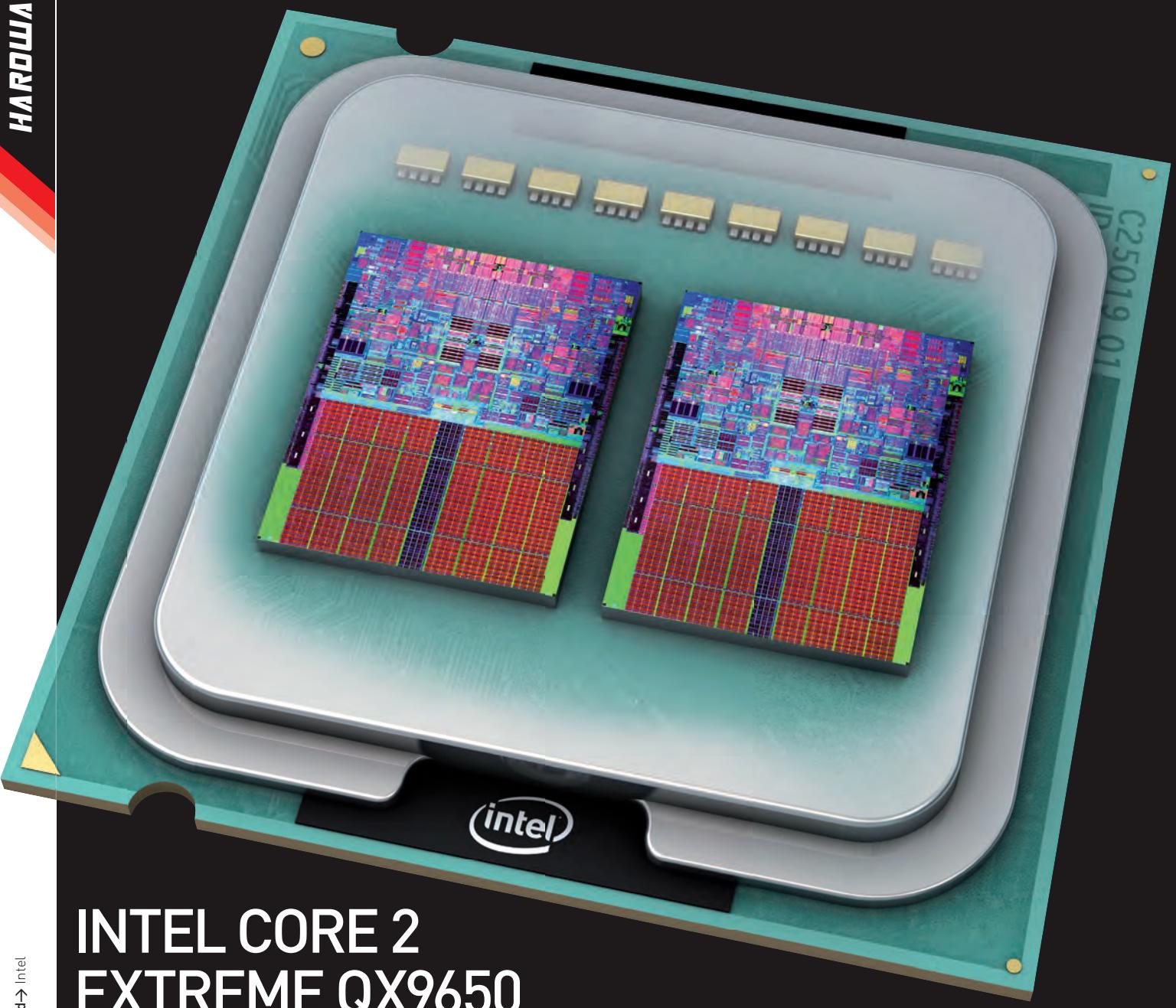
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INTEL CORE 2 EXTREME QX9650

INTEL HAS FINALLY RELEASED the true update to 2006's original Core 2 processors. Yes, the quad-cores at the default 266MHz and 333MHz were worthwhile updates to an already great product line-up, but they were nothing like what Intel has released with the Core 2 Extreme QX9650. This CPU is the first of the Intel 45nm processors and is the highest performing model, operating at a healthy 3GHz (333MHz x 9). That makes it at least as fast as the QX6850.

However, more than that, the new CPU is part of the Penryn family of processors and that means there are at least three new features about it that make it important for high-end users. The first is the process node (impressive in its own right, as it's the first commercially available processor to be manufactured using a 45nm process).

The die shrink process alone means a number of things, all of which affect performance in one way or another. However,

more than anything else, it's responsible for most of the other changes the Penryn family gains (at least the ones that concern gamers and enthusiasts). With a process shrink, the transistors on the CPU itself are much closer, meaning that signal travel is shortened, resulting in better performance for the same instruction or transaction. Besides speeding up the internals of the CPU, the node means lower power requirements and a lower thermal envelope. All these advances are important, because besides being more cost effective to consumers, in theory it allows Intel to fit more onto a chip than previously possible on the 65nm process.

This saving on die size is evident in what Intel has decided to add to the Penryn family of processors, such as the increased on-die cache, which has grown from 8MB on quad-core processors to a hefty 12MB. This cache is, as with previous CPUs, shared in 6MB parts between the two pairs of cores. The



SPECS

CORE	Yorkfield
CORE FREQUENCY	3GHz
SYSTEM BUS FREQUENCY	1,333MHz
L2 CACHE	12MB (2 x 6MB)
NUMBER OF CORES	4

SCORE



additional cache would have probably been unfeasible to implement with the previous 65nm process, as it would have resulted in a core much larger than Intel had with the previous CPUs. With the smaller node, Intel managed to add a total of 4MB of extra cache to the CPU (as much as the total L2 cache of the previous generation Core 2 Extreme X6800).

The benefits of this larger cache are quite significant, especially in synthetic tests - most of which benefit from as much data as possible being available on local cache. Subsequently, the new CPU is set to become the champion of enthusiasts everywhere.

At this point you may be thinking that the new QX9650 is just a Kentsfield CPU with more cache and a smaller fabrication process. That may be true, but there is also the addition of a new instruction set in the form of SSE4. This is beneficial to SSE4-aware programs, such as DivX, which show measurable gains over the previous SSE3 instruction set.

All of the abovementioned are not really what this CPU is about: performance. More specifically, it delivers the best performance currently available on x86 platforms. The QX9650 is the enthusiast's dream CPU: it's faster (significantly) per clock cycle than the current Conroe-based Core 2 CPUs; and it overclocks far better than any other CPU Intel has ever released, bar the Celeron 300A. If you believe that the G0 stepping Core 2 CPUs were something to write home about, then this new improved core will literally blow you away. We were able to overclock the QX9650 to an impressive 4.4GHz. We also ran Dual Prime95 for several hours and the QX9650 achieved a jaw-dropping 4.6GHz in the benchmark Blitz.

The QX6850 was impressive at these speeds, but nowhere near what this new CPU can achieve. The difference in performance is staggering. For

instance, in 3DMark06 we were able to record an incredible 7,455 in the CPU sub-score at 4.4GHz. The QX6850 had to be overclocked to 4.9GHz to achieve the same score. When overclocking both CPUs to 4GHz, the QX6850 managed 500 points less than the QX9650, and this increased as clock speeds continued to rise.

Adding to the QX9650's arsenal, the Yorkfield-based CPU operates at lower temperatures than the Kentsfield CPUs it replaces (which were impressive in their time, but pales in comparison). We couldn't fault this CPU on anything, as it's better than previous-generation CPUs in every way. Intel has outdone itself with this CPU and will have undoubtedly sealed its products' victory over anything the competition can hope to muster within any relevant period. Before actually testing the CPU we were rather sceptical and unexcited about the gains Penryn technology would bring to the Core 2 family of CPUs. However, after testing the QX9650 we are convinced of its benefits.

Besides the incredible performance advantage it offers over anything else available, it is more efficient at memory transactions than the previous core. Paired with low-latency DDR3 memory, we were able to record over 10GB/sec in SiSoft Sandra 2008's memory bandwidth tests. This type of memory throughput places it on par with the competition's products, which make use of an on-board memory controller to achieve similar memory bandwidth results. Just to further illustrate how powerful this CPU is, we were able to play games at slightly higher framerates with this CPU, clocked at 2.4GHz, than we were able to with the QX6850 clocked at 3GHz. If that doesn't convince you about the power of this CPU, nothing else will. The QX9650 is much like the QX6850 and so many others from the Core 2 family before it: the fastest x86 CPU money can buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



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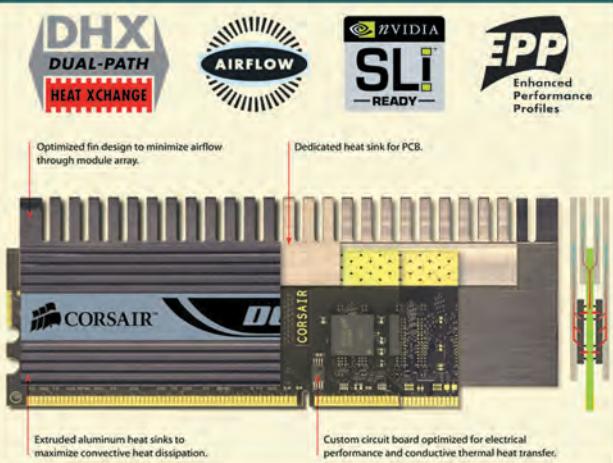
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AIRFLOW

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EPP Enhanced Performance Profiles

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LIAN LI PC-V2000B PLUS II

SOME PEOPLE LIKE THEIR cases lit up like a Christmas tree. Some like them perfectly clear so that you can see all that expensive hardware they've put inside (and will replace once the lack of EM shielding fries it). Then there are those who want to build a powerhouse into the tiniest space possible and watch it melt into a pool of goo as soon as it actually runs a game.

But there's a small group of us out there who don't care about brightness, bragging, or (lack of) size, for whom a case is all about what you can fit in it (whether you can see it or not), how well it's built, and a subtle statement of quality and power. For those people, we present the pinnacle of the art form of case design.

Oh, we're sure you've seen various 'gamer' cases before - assorted sleek black boxes with various claims of expandability and such. How many hard drives would you like to fit in your super, ultra-overclocked gaming rig of doom? Four? Five? Let's try 12. Without mods or bay adapters. Oh, and there will still be room for a DVD writer, an HD DVD drive and a Blu-Ray drive in case you can't decide, a fan control, a front port breakout, a 450W auxiliary bay-mounted power supply, and a floppy drive in a bay converter. Try shoehorning that into your average 'full tower' that can't even fit a proper ATX server motherboard! Dual-Xeon "Nocona" platform? No problem. Want to fit one of those extra-long kilowatt-plus PSUs? How about two; we can change the back plate for that. But wait! What about water-cooling? Room for that too, but the only problem is that this case looks so nice that you may be reluctant to cut holes in it. If you can manage a slot-based breakout, it's not a problem though. There are holes in those dividers so the tubes can route through. Don't need 12 hard drives? They can come out for more room too.

Speaking of hard drives, the mounting process involves installing some screws to the drives and then sliding them into the rails and locking them in with a snap reminiscent of LEGO Technic. The drives and PSU stay in the bottom with a separate cooling path so you don't need to worry about them overheating your graphics card. The airflow up top consists of a back 120mm intake fan



with an aluminium duct that can be aimed to best hit your CPU and RAM, and a 120mm side vent, which can be adjusted forward and back to best cool the graphics card. And yes, an 8800 Ultra's protruding bulge will fit with the fan installed without any hassle. Oh, and don't worry about trying to wrestle warped doors onto the sides of the case. An internal rail slides against the door and secures with a thumbscrew (and lock if you desire) on each side, rather than the door sliding against the case, preserving your sanity.

But surely, you say, such a case must both cost and weigh as much as the moon! Actually, you'll probably think you've been sold an empty box when you first pick it up. It has fooled more than one person in this office. It also costs less than many 'huge' cases with half the bays. The V2000 has but two flaws. First, the front controls consist of a stylish and subtle power button and small blue LED, but no reset button. The second is that it's a rare and hard to find item (we bought the last one), so you may need to pester Frontier Electronics until they import some more. **NAG**

Toby Hudon



SPECS

3.5-INCH BAYS	12
5.25-INCH BAYS	7
FAN MOUNTS	3 x 120mm, 2 x 80mm
PORTS	2 x USB 2.0, 1 x FireWire, Audio
MOTHERBOARD SUPPORT	Full
DIMENSIONS	210mm x 617mm x 625mm
WEIGHT	7.1kg

SCORE





OCZ DDR3 PC3-10666 GOLD EDITION

DR3 IS FINALLY UPON us and is without a doubt the memory of the future. With a lower operating voltage and higher speeds, it's what we have all been waiting for. It will provide great memory bandwidth and incredible power efficiency. At least that's what it is supposed to do.

Unfortunately, this isn't quite true for DDR3 - at least not for the OCZ set we reviewed. OCZ's DDR3 PC3-10666 Gold Edition, in essence, is much like other middle-of-the-road DDR3. It will not be setting any new records because of the reference timings, which are poor even by DDR3 standards. As a result, the RAM delivers the same performance as 'average' DDR2 800MHz RAM. (Hardly what anyone would call impressive at the end of 2007.)

While 9-9-9-64 isn't the worst timings, they are incredibly high and any gain the extra frequency gives is negated by the timings. This is made worse by the fact that this OCZ set cannot tighten to something more respectable like 7-7-7-21, so the set is pretty much locked at 9-9-9-26 at best. The given memory dividers we had on our test motherboard (ASUS P5E3 Deluxe) meant that when we chose any speed higher or below 1,333MHz, the CPU would move to a different strap, resulting in the board not POSTing. If you're an enthusiast, this makes it virtually impossible to notice any gains in performance between DDR2 and DDR3.

In truth, high-speed DDR2 is by far a better investment at this stage than DDR3. There is no contest between the two. DDR2 1,066MHz at 4-4-4-12 will run circles around this set in every single synthetic test.

We were quite disappointed with this OCZ set as it was the first set from OCZ that we reviewed that isn't worth a second look or even recommending. There just isn't any benefit to buying this type of RAM. One thing to consider in favour of DDR2 is that should AMD's Phenom processors prove to be worth bothering with, DDR2 will be around for much longer (which is good because it will give

DDR3 room to grow and mature much like all DDR RAM has done before).

It is also worth mentioning that while OCZ's DDR3 PC3-10666 Gold Edition set was unimpressive, the performance was expected to some degree, as it is the equivalent of DDR2 533MHz. If one thinks back to the introduction of DDR2, there were DDR sets operating at better timings at higher speeds and which performed much better than the newer standard. The same is happening now with DDR2 1,200MHz sets offering much better performance than entry-level DDR3 sets. This time next year there should be sets operating well in the 2GHz region and beyond at better timings than these. That will allow DDR3 to perform the way it's supposed to. Right now, however, it's hardly worth bothering with, especially when one considers the cost of DDR3 RAM.

If you are looking for DDR3 RAM for your motherboard, then OCZ's DDR3 PC3-10666 Gold Edition may be worth purchasing, as the only other choice is even worse RAM from others operating at 800MHz with timings mimicking hard drive seek times. If you are tempted by DDR3 platforms from a performance point of view, this is definitely not the set to buy because it will disappoint you. However, OCZ has another 1,333MHz set under the Platinum banner, which is by far better than this set, capable of CAS 7 and faster than 1,500MHz.

NAG

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CHIPSET	Micron N/A
RATED SPEED	DDR3 1,333MHz (PC3-10666)
TIMINGS	9-9-9-26
VOLTAGE	1.8V

SCORE



HARDWARE

RRP → R4,299 | Supplier → Syntech SA | Website → www.syntechsa.co.za | Brand → OCZ

Thermalright

IFX-14

Inferno Fire eXtinguisher

Quench the fire in your computer system



Back-side heat pipe Cooler



IFX-14 Heatsink Body



- * Larger surface area for heat dissipation
- * Designed for better air flow management to work with the heatsink fans and the air inside computer case
- * Optional to rotate the heatsink 90 degrees to best fit your system configuration
- * Multi-platform compatible backplate for installation on vast number and type of motherboard.

Weight: 790g (heatsink only)
Dimension: L146.2 x W124 x H161 mm (heatsink only)
Recommended Fan: All 120mm & 140mm Fan

IFX-14 Back-side Heat Pipe Cooler



Back-side dual heatpipe heatsink adds additionally cools CPU and also takes care of the heat coming from the back of the motherboard to extend the life expectancy and stability of motherboard

Weight: 130g (heatsink only)
Recommended Fan: All 80mm & 70mm Fan
Dimension (heatsink only): L134.5 x W163.5 x H112.6 mm



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ICY DOCK MB455SPF-B MULTI BAY

ICY DOCK HAS BEEN focusing exclusively on delivering new products that support our ever-spiralling storage needs, and perhaps more critically, the concept of being able to take these massive hard drives with you wherever you may go (through the introduction of a wide range of external hard drive enclosures). This five-bay drive stacker still supports this base concept, but is also something more.

What this unit basically is, is an internal SATA 3Gb/sec enclosure for adding more storage capacity to a system with limited support for further expansion. Many cases only have room for four or five 3.5-inch drives, so if you (like most of us) find yourself running a number of smaller drives with different capacities, which you've had for some time, there's often no space for that new and much-needed 750GB monster. This leaves you with the option of moving all the data from your old 120GB HDD to the new drive and utilising the older unit elsewhere if possible, or filling one of your typically ample 5.25-inch bays with a mounting kit and installing the new HDD there.

Icy Dock has recognised this need, which is why the MB455SPF-B Multi Bay utilises three of these bays (still leaving room for two optical drives on most midi-tower case designs) and in return provides five additional 3.5-inch HDD connectors. This actually allows you to utilise that array of SATA ports on your modern motherboard without building an open-sided, cable-

hanging 'FrankenPC'.

It's all rather neatly executed. The unit is well built, using a combination of aluminium and plastic, and fits snugly into the assigned bays. You also save on SATA power connectors - another limiting factor when connecting large numbers of this newer interface to any PC. Sure, the MB455SPF-B utilises no less than three Molex power connectors, but apart from these (and in part thanks to the slimness of the five SATA cables necessary to make full use of its capacity), connecting the unit to your system is simple and tidy.

Of course, the MB455SPF-B still provides data portability, with each HDD installed in a hot-swappable, removable drive tray that locks securely into place via a large, silver handle, making it quick and easy to swap out drives if you have even more than the provided-for number! These bays are well designed and slide in and out of the unit smoothly and easy.

Then there are the extra features, especially useful if you're installing this unit in a mission-critical system. A large, very quiet, ball bearing-equipped 80mm fan clips onto the rear of the device, and this cooler is itself hot swappable in case of failure. This fan expels hot air from the enclosure, allowing your drives to operate nice and cool, despite being closely stacked together. Thermal monitoring provides further protection against excess temperatures, and the MB455SPF-B will alert the user audibly if any of the spinning

SPECS

INTERNAL HOST	SATA
SUPPORTED DRIVES	5 X 3.5" SATA I/II
REQUIRED BAYS	3 X 5.25 "
TRANSFER RATE	3 Gb/s
COOLING	Rear fan
ALARM TYPES	Audio and LED
SECURITY	Tray locking function

SCORE



discs exceeds the configurable threshold temperature.

Performance is identical to a drive plugged directly into the motherboard, as the backplane is essentially just a straight-through connection with no added drive intelligence. The benefit of this, rather than a custom backplane, is that you don't need to install any additional drivers for the unit to be recognised by the OS.

Very useful, exceptionally well built, and a real solution to a genuine storage problem faced today, the Icy Dock MB455SPF-B struck all the right chords with us. If you only have three 5.25-inch bays available but desperately need more SATA-based storage, look no further. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

MICROSOFT MOBILITY PACK

RRP → R899 | Supplier → Microsoft | Website → www.microsoft.com/hardware | Brand → Microsoft

IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU can learn from technology, it's irony. With technology we got to undress quite a few ironies about ourselves. Clearly we don't think the way we think we do. A good example is the paperless office. It made sense - if you can put data on digital discs, there would be less paper. But what happened? All that digital space brought about MORE paperwork. Years ago there was a picture of Bill Gates holding a CD-R and sitting on a huge pile of paper. That was apparently the amount of pages one CD could store. We use more office paper and DVDs just to get our magazines out. Fact is, things do not happen quite the way we think they do, because of the human factor. Take another place where a good idea just made the other more popular. Touch pads are fine for navigating around a computer, but they don't replace a mouse. Touch screens, I believe, might, but for now it is much more precise using your hand instead of your finger.

That brings us to this little number from Microsoft. Dubbed the Wireless Notebook Laser Mouse 6000, it's a fun-sized mouse that works wirelessly with your machine. This link is courtesy of a USB stick, which snaps onto the bottom of the mouse when not in use. Overall it is a nice, responsive mouse - the laser allows it to handle more surfaces than an optical ever could. It's powered by one standard AA battery. My only real complaint



is that everything on it is small, especially the mouse wheel and side button. It feels like a mouse designed for smaller people, not smaller spaces. Pretty much all mobile mice make this mistake, though.

But, as you might note, this is a mobility pack. That's because it also includes the LifeCam NX-600, a USB-operated two-megapixel webcam that snapped onto all the laptops I tried. It also comes with its own travel pouch, but strangely the mouse doesn't. Granted, the camera is more prone to damage. Overall not a bad package at all, especially if you want a hassle-free wireless mouse. But if you prefer a larger pointing device, stick to your regular models. **NAG**

James Francis

SPECS

BUTTONS	4
DPI	1,000
INTERFACE	USB/Wireless
HAND	Ambidextrous

SCORE



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CORSAIR XMS3 CM3 X1024-1066C7

RRP→ R7,910 | Supplier→ Frontosa | Website→ www.frontosa.co.za
Brand→ Corsair

DDR3 MEMORY HAS BEEN with us for less than a year and already it is scaling to speeds much quicker than DDR2 ever did. It is almost reminiscent of DDR. However, one key difference is that DDR3 is horribly expensive, so much so that despite fantastic performance from some modules such as these, the price is hard to justify.

As it stands, the fastest DDR3 RAM available is this Corsair set and you'll be hard pressed to find anything remotely close in timings and rated speed. Rated at an impressive 1.8GHz, it's the highest rated RAM we have ever had for review. It's low-latency RAM (7-7-7-20), making it ideal for enthusiasts or those gamers who want only the highest framerates. It would have been impressive if Corsair had shipped the modules at the same speed, but with the usual 9-9-9-26 settings of typical DDR3, that they have managed to produce CL7 RAM is incredible. More than that, this set was capable of operating at 5-5-5-15 timings at 1,560MHz (780MHz SDR), which are the most efficient settings for this RAM.

You may be wondering why the RAM was faster at a considerably lower speed. After all, the whole point of this set is high speed

at the tightest timings possible. Well, the truth is that you are going to have an incredibly hard time operating the RAM at 1,800MHz, and that is purely because of the X38 and P35 chipsets.

These chipsets officially support DDR3 1,333MHz only, and anything higher than that means that you have to increase the FSB, which in itself would be fine if it weren't for the fact that the divider simply doesn't exist that will allow you to overclock to 1,800MHz. A significant overclock on the FSB would be your best option and that means you will need at least 500MHz to even come near the rated speed. As a result of this, we had to settle for the 1,333MHz setting and overclock from there, finally reaching 1,560MHz at 5-5-5-15 (which resulted in the set outpacing anything else we have ever had). Corsair has produced yet another quality product that deserves top honours as the fastest set of RAM available in the country. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



SPECS

CHIPSET	Micron
RATED SPEED	DDR3 1,800MHz (PC3-14400)
TIMINGS	7-7-7-20
VOLTAGE	2.0V

SCORE



CORSAIR TWIN2X2048-6400C4DHX

RRP→ R1,805 | Supplier→ Frontosa | Website→ www.frontosa.co.za
Brand→ Corsair

By now you may be thinking, "Not another DDR800 RAM review!" and you may be tempted to skip over this latest offering. However, we urge you not to. The reason for this is quite simple: this set of DDR2 800 RAM is seriously fast. This may be true for almost all sets of PC6400 RAM we have had for review, but the honest truth is that this set, *par none*, is much faster.

Forget about the DHX (Dual-Path Heat Exchange) technology and its ability to keep the ICs at manageable temperatures. One could even ignore the fact that the RAM looks good and would fit into many gaming and enthusiast setups alike. All of this is secondary to the incredible overclocking headroom that this RAM provides. We didn't realise how good this set was until we attempted the impossible (at least for regular DDR800): setting the RAM to operate at 1.2GHz. With a reference voltage of 2.1V, we didn't expect anything above the 1,080MHz mark with anything better than 5-5-5-15 timings. However, we were pleasantly surprised.

This Corsair set needed only a little more voltage to set a new benchmark in performance DDR2 RAM speeds, and it did so at comfortable 5-5-5-15 timings. With an Airflow fan unit from Corsair, some

secondary timings tweaking and voltage adjustments, we believe one could reach the 1,250MHz mark. However, even if this RAM never reaches that speed, the 400MHz overclock at such reasonable timings made it quicker than the DDR3 1,333MHz set we also reviewed in this issue. This makes it an ideal set for enthusiasts who need the highest speed possible without having to pay ridiculous amounts of money for premium grade parts.

With the Twin2X2048-6400C4DHX, Corsair has once again managed to put themselves above anybody else in terms of performance and reliability. There is no doubt that this Corsair PC6400 set is the best DDR800 set we have ever tested. There are cheaper sets available locally with the same timings, but none of them clock anywhere near as well as this set. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



SPECS

CHIPSET	Micron D9GMH
RATED SPEED	DDR2 800MHz (PC6400)
TIMINGS	4-4-4-12
VOLTAGE	2.1V

SCORE



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The NAG Field

LAST MONTH YOU SURVIVED the gruelling first part of our three-part NAG Field Guide to Gaming. The goal of this feature is to get you from Here to There when it comes to the best hobby in the known universe: gaming. We believe this is achievable by giving people a good starting resource for further exploration. We're trying to give new recruits (and veterans alike) a sporting chance in what is quickly becoming an industry too big to approach without a guide, unless you're very patient and like to experiment. Part One (Boot Camp) covered the basics (the very important classifications of the "Super Genres"), which a complete novice can use as a foundation that will help understand this month's Part Two. In Part Three (Active Duty) next month, we'll show you how to apply what you've learned towards game purchases, gaming conversation and gaming duals to the death in a futuristic arena of ultimate carnage.

WELCOME BACK, SOLDIER!

Time to get into the game and do some real damage

Hoo-ah! Stand up straight! Suck in that gut! Get down and give me 20! Here's your change! Let's get a move on soldier, lots of ground to cover today! Now that you know the super genres you can accurately identify similar groups of games based on what the game expects you to do - and that's useful. However, identifying the game is no good unless you can convince the troglodyte behind

the counter to give you the one you want. Let's learn to confuse sales reps and build your own rep by examining the terminology in gaming, divided into two groups - Group A is acceptable for spoken dialogue while Group B contains words that you should never try to say out loud. Results may vary depending on who you like to hang out with.

TO WALK THE WALK, YOU GOTTA TALK THE TALK!

Smacktalk: Words, Lingo and Terminology

Group A - Spoken

Frag: This word usually refers to when you 'kill' someone in a multiplayer game. The term may originate from the Vietnam War, used primarily by US military personal to mean "assassinating an unpopular officer of one's own fighting unit, often by means of a fragmentation grenade". The first recorded incident dates back to as early as the 1800s.

Gib: Gib, or "jiblet", are the bits left behind when someone is ripped apart after they are fragged. That person is then considered "gibbed". Example: "Gibalishious, pass the jiblets!"

Noob: Also known as "newbie" or "nooblet", this is often used as a derogatory term for someone who is new to a game, but can also be used as a term of affection for a new piece of meat to play with. Example: "Could someone find this nooblet a frag-buddy?"

Co-op: Also known as "cooperative", this

describes when a game allows two or more players to play the game together towards a common goal. Notable examples of co-op in history includes *Bubble Bobble*, *Contra* and more recently, *Gears of War*.

LAN Party: When gamers gather and network their computers with the goal of playing either with or against each other, that's a LAN Party. If all the gamers do is share pornography or copy TV episodes from each other, that is more commonly known as a "Leech Party".

Aggro: This word describes an aggressive creature in a game that has targeted you or another player in your group, and poses a threat.

Aimbot: A program or software tool used with first person-shooting games to help the player shoot more efficiently or automatically. Like taking 'supplements', this is considered cheating.

Buff: This often refers to a bonus that is given to a game character that extends the character's ability, either permanently or temporarily, and is often gained from an in-game item or ability. Bad Example: "Dude, lemme buff you".

Nerf: Referring to a condition given to a character or enemy that makes them less effective. This term is also used to describe when a developer re-balances a game and makes something unnecessarily weak.

Example: "They've nerfed the nuclear attack stealth tesla dogs!"

BYOC: Bring Your Own Computer is a term



GLide to Gaming

PART TWO: PATROL DUTY

used to tell attendants of a computer-related party to bring their own computers if they want to participate.

Camper: Often used in gaming to describe an individual who remains in one place for a majority of the game, picking off other players as they come to them. Generally this position gives that player an advantage over other players. Often used with a suffix or prefix of the word "fag". This is considered a gaming social faux pas, if you're over the age of 13.

Deathmatch: This describes a type of game mode where players win by obtaining the most frags. Often abbreviated to DM or TDM for Team Deathmatch. Deathmatch is a commonly accepted method of laying down some "ownage".

CTF: Capture The Flag is a game mode where traditionally the objective is to retrieve the enemy flag and return it to your flag.

D-pad: The Directional Pad is a cross-shaped area on a gamepad that accepts eight discrete and mutually exclusive depressions. Clockwise from the top, these are: up; up-right; right; down-right; down; down-left; left; up-left.

FPS: When used to denote Frames Per Second, this indicates the number of individual screen frames that the game can render to the screen per second. Higher FPS good, lower FPS bad. When used to describe a First-Person Shooter, it means a game genre where all the action takes place looking through the main character point of view.

Ownage: When a player or team is being

dominated by another player or team, it's referred to as "being owned". Ownage is when you're the pigeon, and everyone else is the statue. "Pure Pwnage" is a popular Internet show, while "Pwnage" is an accepted spelling of Ownage but is never to be pronounced "Pawnage", because that's just silly.

Framedrop: When a game suddenly drops to lower Frames Per Second, which could be attributed to a variety of reasons. Framedrop bad.

DirectX: A mystical set of programming standards used by mystic programmers to commune with the benign race of hardware that powers our gaming experiences into hyperspace. DirectX is developed by Microsoft. **Ping:** Your ping is the time it takes for your computer to send data to a remote location over the network (including the Internet), and receive a confirmation that the data was received. Ping represents your "round-trip" time, and has a big influence on online gaming.

Lag: When you are lagging, or lag, it means you are no longer running at an optimal ping for what you want to do. In gaming, lag is very bad.

Teh: The correct spelling of the long misspelled word, "The".

Group B - Written

AFK: Away From Keyboard. You are away from your keyboard, and may not respond to anyone.

10 1982:
Colecovision

11 1982:
Vectrex

12 1985:
Nintendo Entertainment System (NES)

13 1986:
Atari 7800

14 1986:
SEGA Master System (SMS)

15 1989:
NEC TurboGrafx 16

16 1989:
Sega Genesis

17 1990:
SNK NEO-GEO (AES)

18 1991:
Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES)

BBL: Be Back Later. You are leaving and may return at a later time.

BRB: Be Right Back. You will return shortly from a quick departure.

ROFL: Roll On The Floor Laughing. You are finding something hilarious enough to pretend that you are on your floor rolling around mirthfully.

PWN: Own. Also known as Pawn. The first one is right, the second one isn't. Trust is, we're experts.

LOL: Laugh Out Loud. Usually typed while someone is laughing with a raised volume.

OMG: Oh My God. An exclamation often used to denote extreme shock at something.

ZOMG: Zoh-Oh-Em-Gee. A variant of OMG often used for extra emphasis.

OMFG: Oh My F**king God. It's rude, but that's what it means. Nobody said gamers were polite all the time.

WTF: What The F**k. A poignant query about something specific.

BHQ: Barbecue. Like a braai, but more American.

LET'S MEET THE NATIVES AND MAKE THEM LOVE US!

Online: Through the looking glass

There are plenty of places to go and experience the best (and worst) gaming has to offer in terms of the people who participate in this glorious hobby. This is by no means a complete list, but it focuses primarily on the more familiar local communities. This

is to help you ease into the culture, because compared to South Africa, the international gaming scene is, in a word, OMFGWTBBQ. <http://games.saix.net>: Here you will find listings of locally hosted online game servers for many games that enjoy popularity in South Africa. Also known as "SGS" collectively, the Saix Gaming Service contains a large forum filled to the brim with eager and vocal gamers.

<http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>: Our own little home away from home, the Tide Media forums are a safe refuge from the barbarians at the gate - casual conversation in a moderated yet friendly environment can be found here.

<http://www.txl.co.za>: The Xbox Lounge is a community-centric Website dedicated to the Xbox 360, with forums and user-managed events.

<http://www.xbox-360.co.za>: When the 360 first launched locally, Xbox-360.co.za was already there waiting. A solid community can be found on its forums.

<http://www.prophecy.co.za>: Currently, Prophecy is an online store for buying hardware and other computer-related goods and hosts one of the larger gaming forums in South Africa. Trivia: Prophecy was started by the current editor of NAG, many eons ago.

<http://www.take2.co.za>: Take 2 is a giant online retailer that will sell you plenty of things if you give them your money. Known to be reliable, Take 2 has been very active in the local gaming scene.

<http://www.ps3za.co.za>: Aimed at PlayStation 3 owners, this new addition to the local online universe is a Take 2 initiative and already has a very active forum.

<http://www.wiiza.co.za>: The same as above, but aimed at Wii owners who are looking to talk to other Wii owners about Wii-related

stuff. The forums are Wii-tastic.

<http://www.systemshock.co.za>: Hardware evangelists, riggers, modders and overclockers parade around the System Shock forums and talk about technical stuff.

THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW HISTORY ARE DOOMED TO REPEAT IT!

The Industry: An Overview

There are two ways to do this: our way, or the other way. The 'other way' will involve you taking a good, long look at the "Complete History of Home Video Games" featured on these pages, then cross-referencing everything you see with a Website such as the Ultimate Console Database (<http://ultimateconsoledatabase.com/>). Using this newly gained knowledge, you will then have to draw your own conclusions about the effects of the past gaming industry machinations on what is the current market situation. Our way is to simply sit back and let us paint you a picture you can either choose to believe or not. We think we're quite accurate but if you disagree, be sure to let us know why.

RIGHT NOW, THE INDUSTRY LOOKS LIKE THIS:

The current generation of home entertainment consoles: Microsoft Xbox 360 (360), Sony PlayStation 3 (PS3), Nintendo Wii (Wii).

The current generation of mobile/handheld consoles: Nintendo DS (DS), Sony PlayStation Portable (PSP).

A console is a piece of hardware that has been designed and marketed with the main purpose of playing games. Even though many consoles have functions not related to playing games (e.g. streaming media, protein folding, fat free grill), the main function is still one

19 1992:
NEC TurboDuo

20 1992:
Sega CD for Genesis

21 1993:
Atari Jaguar

22 1993:
Panasonic 3DO Interactive

23 1994:
Sega Genesis 32x

24 1994:
SNK NEO-GEO CD

25 1995:
Sega Saturn

26 1995:
Sony PlayStation

27 1996:
Nintendo 64

of entertainment through playing games. Some mobile devices also fall in our definition for console and in some cases their sales overshadow the home console sales figures.

Nintendo is having a spectacular success with its latest console, the Nintendo Wii, due to its appealing price point and no-nonsense approach to gaming. The Wii doesn't try to be a full multimedia solution and thus far the innovative control scheme (and sensible price) has captured the hearts of the far larger non-gaming demographic. It is unknown if the current positive public appeal will last. The Nintendo DS remains a firm favourite across the world and in Japan the DS is also being sold in bookstores and pharmacies due to the big range of self-improvement titles available for it. Nintendo doesn't seem focused on the online gaming sector yet. The Wii is built on existing GameCube hardware, the Game Cube itself having been a lukewarm success for Nintendo.

In the past: Nintendo has been around for long enough (since the 1800s) and survived enough so that nothing short of an unnatural natural catastrophe will unseat them from their comfortable position in gaming. Never afraid to innovate or make mistakes, Nintendo continues to diversify and make smart choices, but has proven to not be immune from blinding arrogance. The failure of the Nintend 64, Virtual Boy and GameCube were wake-up calls for Nintendo that they finally appear to have noticed. Sony may have prematurely tried to move its fan base from the **PlayStation 2** to its new powerful but complicated PlayStation 3, which is not enjoying public favour but shows signs of improvement. History has shown that the most powerful console has never

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come out on top in its generation, something the PlayStation 3 may suffer from. Sony are focused on the online distribution sector. The PlayStation Network store is a quality online retailer for buying indie-developed games, older PlayStation 1 titles for playing on your PSP as well as quality titles such as *Warhawk*. Sony made poor choices with the PlayStation 3 price point and controller, but is now moving to fix the issues with broad decisive strokes. Sony is currently trying to convince third-party developers that the PlayStation 3 is still worth it. The latest batch of PS3 games from first-party developers are impressive and finally presents a proper reason to buy a PlayStation 3 if your goal is gaming.

In the past: The PlayStation 1 was a moderate success but the PlayStation 2 was really the right-place-right-time system and Sony still enjoys the fruits of that. The PlayStation 2 is the most sold console worldwide and rightfully so. A solid console with a large library of quality titles, the PlayStation 2 had just entered its Golden Age when Sony decided to bring out the PlayStation 3 so as not to be "left behind" in this console generation. The move was made prematurely and, perhaps blinded by arrogance, Sony overstated themselves and understated reasonable pricing and understandable hardware to develop for.

Microsoft is enjoying a steady growth with its Xbox brand due to the Xbox 360. The original Xbox didn't make a big splash internationally outside the US but it captured the hearts of college students across America thanks to a good price point and the deathmatch antics of *Halo*. The 360 launched first of this generation and as a result suffers from early hardware failure. Microsoft solved this issue by extending the warranty on the

360 from one year to three for free, which let disgruntled owners replace the console easily enough if it RRoD'd [Red Ring of Death - a term used to describe when the 360 shows a full flashing red ring due to hardware failure]. The 360 continues to enjoy popularity with an entirely new generation of gamers who missed the PlayStation 2 explosion (or didn't like the games for it). Xbox LIVE represents the best online community, matchmaking and distribution system gaming has ever seen (with Valve's Steam coming in a close second now that Steam Community has been unveiled). Paying for Xbox LIVE Gold doesn't seem to perturb gamers who want more than what the free Silver account has to offer.

In the past: Microsoft, not one to be left out, released the original Xbox not as a proper attempt at gaining foothold in what quickly became Sony's market after the PlayStation 2, but to research the wants and needs of the gaming culture. They discovered, by mining the information gained from their Xbox fans, that there was a desire for a specific type of console with quality online services. As a result, the Xbox 360 with a much-expanded LIVE service was unveiled.

The **personal computer** gaming market is still as strong as it has ever been, even though it is simply not as large as the collective console market. The strong, long-running online gaming scene keeps the PC gaming sector firmly interested in fragging it out online. There is still a strong single-player proponent to PC gaming, but for how long is anyone's guess right now. The PC benefits from the easiest indie-development scene as the PC remains the easiest system to program a game for, as long as the game doesn't overextend the

basic hardware baseline of the majority. As a rule of thumb, the lower the system specification requirements on a game, the easier that game was to develop. There are exceptions to this rule, games that are systematically complex (such as *Civilization*) still involve complex programming to create the eventual supporting systems for gameplay. The PC enjoys several genres that evolved the fastest on PC due to the control schemes the PC has to offer, namely the keyboard and mouse, which suit certain styles of game best including Real Time Strategy and Role-Playing games. This is something that is slowly changing as developers become more creative in their application of game controller interfaces. *Fight Night Round 3* and *skate* are good examples of games that work well with a console controller has to offer.

In the past: The PC suffers from slight isolationist viewpoints when it comes to the gaming culture that surrounds it. Many newcomers to gaming reached it via the PC, which has always managed to provide interesting and compelling games that can be played easily enough on a work machine. The success of id Software's FPS, *Doom*, could easily be attributed to how well the game ran on university computers and networks, which in turn made students want their own PCs at home. Gaming on the PC has had an explosive, colourful history running in parallel to the console gaming scene. PC-exclusive gamers often believe that PC gaming is the "one true" form of gaming, which is of course a factually incorrect viewpoint. Like consoles, the PC is simply another avenue for gaming, and platform agnosticism is generally regarded as a much more holistic way to approach gaming. **NAG**



CHAOS REIGNS AT WCG '07

THE WORLD CYBER GAMES no longer carries the kind of prestige it once did. While the organisation continues to produce impressive large-scale events and has – with certain reservations – achieved its aim of establishing a multinational “cyber culture” festival, the best players and teams no longer regard it as the event to win.

This fall in public esteem can be explained by two main factors. Firstly, the WCG’s game selection for the past three years has been generally poor – poor in the sense that many of the games chosen have been without established competitive communities. In 2005, the world was stunned to hear that there would be no one-versus-one first-person shooter, and that *Counter-Strike: Source* was to be used instead of version 1.6 (the widely-accepted standard at the time). Together, these developments resulted in a lack of interest from the traditional spectator base, but because the event was held in Asia – Singapore to be precise – a slew of strategy games served to bolster the numbers.

However, when the WCG moved to Europe in 2006 (Monza, Italy), the full extent of the problem became apparent. Top players and teams started skipping this once not-to-be-missed tournament to attend other events, leaving weakened fields of competitors. Spectator interest plummeted.

Another reason the game choices have left much to be desired is the sheer number of them. Considering that most other leagues support between four and six at a time, the WCG’s list of twelve games seems to be stretching the market a bit thin. Several of the new additions for 2007 (such as *Carom3D*, a billiards simulator) have also pointed in a more casual direction, again departing from the preferences of the WCG’s core audience.

After administration problems plagued the 2006 event, the WCG organising committee needed a strong rebound in 2007. Its publicity campaign was appropriately grand and the proposed venue for the event, in Seattle, USA, rivalled even the Seoul Olympic Park location of 2003. Having also reverted to *Counter-Strike 1.6*, the WCG had gone a long way towards making amends with its fan base. This could be clearly seen in the list of participating teams. The world’s best – Fnatic (Sweden), Pentagram G-Shock (Poland), Made in Brazil (Brazil), Meet Your Makers (Norway), Team Noa (Denmark) – were present, and public attention followed. WCG 2007 was to be one of the biggest CS tournaments of the year.

What it became, however, was a tournament of unfortunate upsets and disputed results. Underdog victories can certainly enhance the spectator experience, but not when inept tournament planning and lax refereeing cause them. And this is the second and most important reason for the recent decline of the WCG’s popularity.

The decision not to seed teams for the group draw put three of the leading teams in the same group. One of them would be going home early, while other virtually unknown



teams were progressing through less difficult groups. As it turned out, the first big name to depart was none other than Swedish outfit, Fnatic, who had not finished outside of the top three in over a year. To make matters worse, it became known after the deciding match that the South Korean team, e-STRO, had used an illegal technique called “duck-jumping.” By crouching directly after a jump, the South Koreans were able to move at running speeds without making footstep sounds. The referees failed to notice that e-STRO were using the trick, and then refused to take action when it was pointed out at a later stage, citing the fact that Fnatic captain, Harley “dsn” Orwall, had already signed off on the match.

“The referees had no clue that they used it against us,” said Orwall. “I tried to explain that it’s very hard to see, and it would have taken time to watch demos to notice it.” Fnatic’s complaint went unacknowledged, and e-STRO progressed to the second round. The South Koreans eventually reached the quarterfinals of the tournament, beating Meet Your Makers, but only after their initial loss was overturned on grounds of duck jumping by the Norwegians. This ironic decision fuelled still more debate, and resulted in widespread criticism of the inconsistent refereeing. “In a tournament with all the conditions met for success, it will be remembered as one of the biggest flops,” reflected Orwall. “With referees with very little knowledge of *Counter-Strike*, I’m not looking forward to next year’s WCG.”

The subsequent rounds saw further upsets, with Pentagram G-Shock, Made

RESULTS:

Counter-Strike

1. Emulate (France)
2. Team Noa (Denmark)
3. Amazing Gaming (Ukraine)

WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne

1. Olav “Creolophus” Undheim (Norway)
2. Xiaofeng “Sky” Li (China)
3. Jae Ho “Moon” Jang (South Korea)

Dead or Alive 4

1. Jeremy “Black Mamba” Florence (USA)
2. Niklas “SkatanMilla” Lagerborg (Sweden)
3. Carl “Perfect Legend” White (USA)

Project Gotham Racing 3

1. Wouter “Handewasser” von Someren (Netherlands)
2. Wesley “Ch0mpr” Cwiklo (USA)
3. You Chen “Burberry” Liu (Taiwan)

in Brazil, Roccat (Finland) and Virtus Pro (Russia) being knocked out of the running. Ultimately, only one of the recognised teams – Team Noa – remained. Their opponents in the final were the lesser-known French players from Emulate, a team many had expected to be knocked out in the round-robin stage. However, WCG 2007 was to remain the tournament of the underdogs. Emulate won in two straight maps, a surprisingly one-sided final that was as much a triumph for the French as it was an anticlimax for the tournament.

SOUTH AFRICA AT THE WORLD CYBER GAMES

SENDING ONLY ONE PLAYER to the WCG Grand Final event may seem like a modest accomplishment, but in the context of recent years, it is a promising step towards once again supporting a full team. After the shambles of 2006, when the WCG licence was taken over by ambitious new management only to be cancelled shortly thereafter, the strides made by the Amateur Gaming Association of South Africa (AGASA) are admirable.

Through their partnership with Mind Sports South Africa (MSSA) – the official body responsible for electronic sports in the country – AGASA has built up a series of online leagues, which it uses as qualifiers for larger LAN-based events. Being affiliated with MSSA, it can award national colours to the winners of its leagues, providing an official stamp of approval from the government.

While *Counter-Strike* would have been the most popular game to select for the local WCG qualifier, AGASA's limited budget meant it would be impossible to send a five-man team overseas. As such, the next most popular of the WCG-supported titles was chosen – *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars*.

Pieter "Slick" van Nieuwenhuizen, a former *Quake III* player and regular local LAN attendee, saw off the competition at the local qualifier to earn his ticket to Seattle and a chance to be the third South African to make it out of group play at an international competition. And his campaign was more successful than most would have expected. After losing to the Swiss and Saudi Arabian representatives, van Nieuwenhuizen beat the as-yet undefeated Canadian player, Pier Alexis "Fallen" Chabot, to claim valuable points, coming within a hair's breadth of qualifying for the single elimination.

NAG congratulates Pieter on his achievement and wishes the AGASA team well for future events.

WCG COMMAND & CONQUER 3 RESULTS

1. Shaun "Appolloo" Clark (UK)
2. Leon "Xeon" Machens (Germany)
3. Pascal "Dackel" Pfefferle (Germany)

E-SPORTS TODAY

TAIWAN VS. CHINA

FROM TOMMIE SMITH AND John Carlos' black power salute at the 1968 Olympic Games, to Henry Olonga and Andy Flower's armbands "mourning the death of democracy in Zimbabwe" during a cricket match in South Africa, political statements have always managed to find their way into sport.

E-sports is no different. One of the most talked-about controversies at this year's World Cyber Games involved a Taiwanese player, You Chen "Burberry" Liu, and several members of the Chinese national team. Liu, an accomplished virtual driver, had just won the bronze medal in *Project Gotham Racing 3* (a remarkable achievement, considering CGS champion, Wesley "Ch0mpr" Cwiklo, had finished second). When called to the podium to receive his medal, Liu unfurled and held up the Taiwanese flag.

Members of the Chinese team, including renowned *WarCraft III* player, Wei Liang "Fly100%" Lu, and *StarCraft* silver-medallist, Jun Chun "PJ" Sha, rushed to the stage and began to shout insults at the Taiwanese player. After the ceremony, the Chinese contingent continued to harass the Taiwanese team, demanding that they "hand over" Liu and attempting physically to prevent them from leaving the venue. Ultimately, the Seattle police and event staff were forced to step in to separate the players, with reports of blows being exchanged. The altercation resumed when both teams arrived back at their hotel, with the event and hotel staff again having to

step in to restrain the Chinese players.

To understand the reason for the conflict, it is important to note the history between the two countries. China considers Taiwan to be one of its provinces and has promised reunification by whatever means necessary. Due to its leading position in the world economy, most nations in the international community don't recognise Taiwan as an independent state. China has threatened to boycott any sporting or cultural event where the Taiwanese flag (the old Republic of China flag) is displayed – most notably at the Olympics, where Taiwanese athletes must bear the insignia and flag of "Chinese Taipei." As such, the Chinese players at WCG 2007 had a very real fear that their government would ban them from future events. Their violent behaviour, however, cannot be excused.

Taiwanese politicians opposed to reunification with China have latched on to the incident as further evidence of Chinese belligerence. "They cursed our boys because they were holding our national flag," said Wang Sing-nan of the Democratic Progressive Party. "Is that the way for the Chinese to treat Taiwanese people while saying they want to unite with us?"

The official stance of the WCG organising committee has been to apologise to China for the incident, but no punitive measures have yet been taken against players from either side. **NAG**

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Support Video-In & Audio-In
Support Tele-Text & Time-Shifting
PC Power UP Scheduling (VideoMate E500 only)
Remote Control included



PCI
EXPRESS

Universal Analog & Digital TV/FM Card

Internal PCI-Express (1x)
Hardware MPEG Encoding (VideoMate E800 only)
Support Analogue & Digital (DVB-T)
Support MCE in DVB-T
Stereo Sound / TV-Tuner with FM
Support PC Power-Up Scheduling
Support Video-In & Audio-In
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ARKANOID IN PICTURES

INSTEAD OF PRINTING RAW source code, like the magazines of yore used to, we're giving you a series of pictures and a challenge. The challenge is to make Game Maker (obtainable on the DVD) look just like these screenshots and you'll have yourself a game.

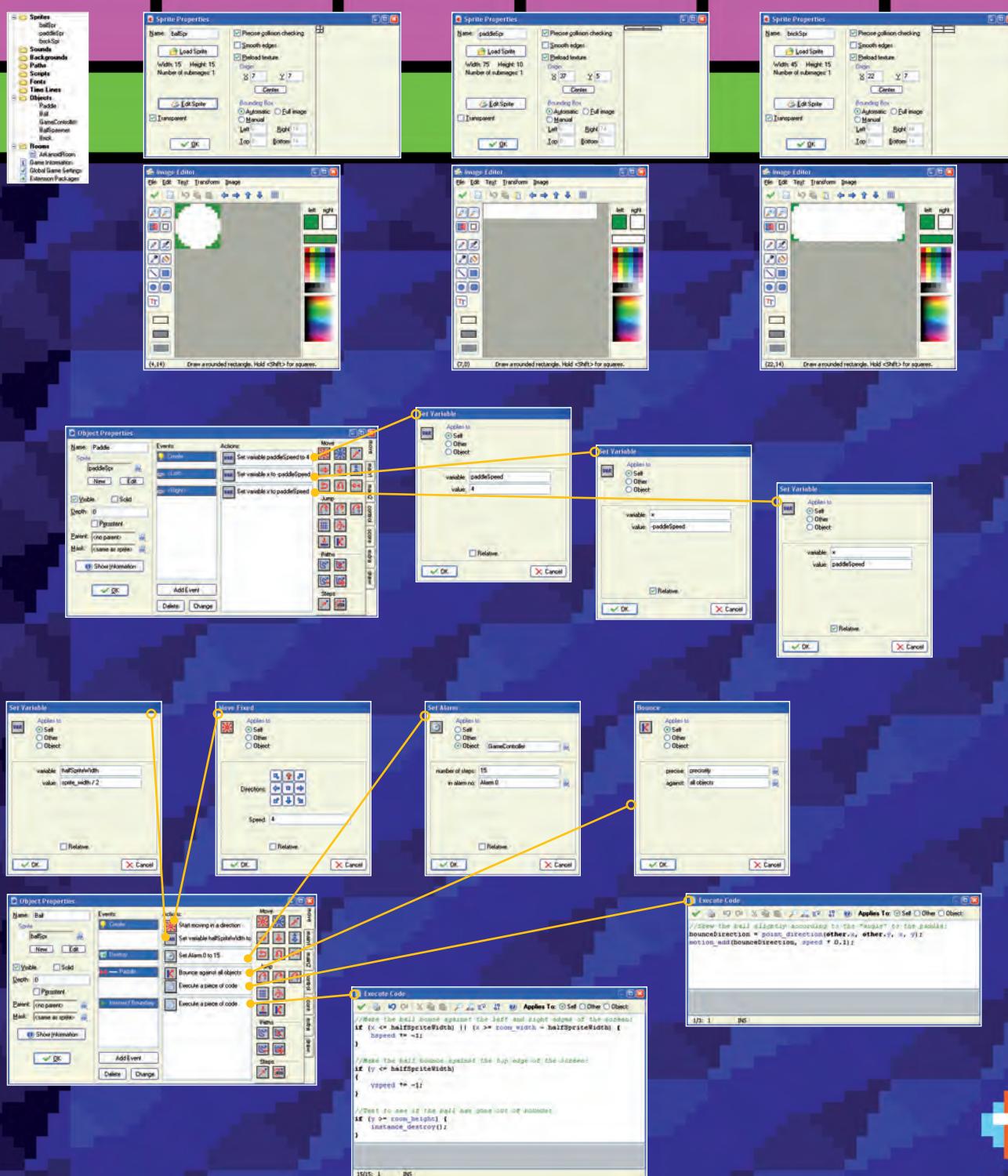
This month we're handing you an Arkanoid framework. Some of you may know this game as *Breakout*, others as

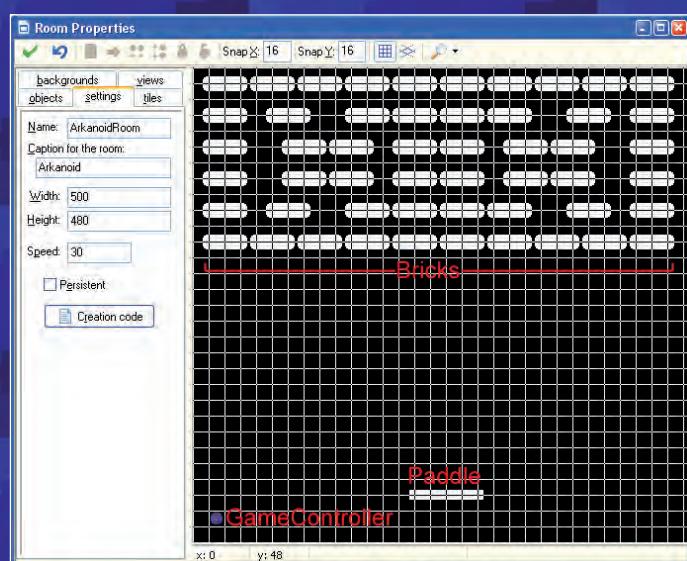
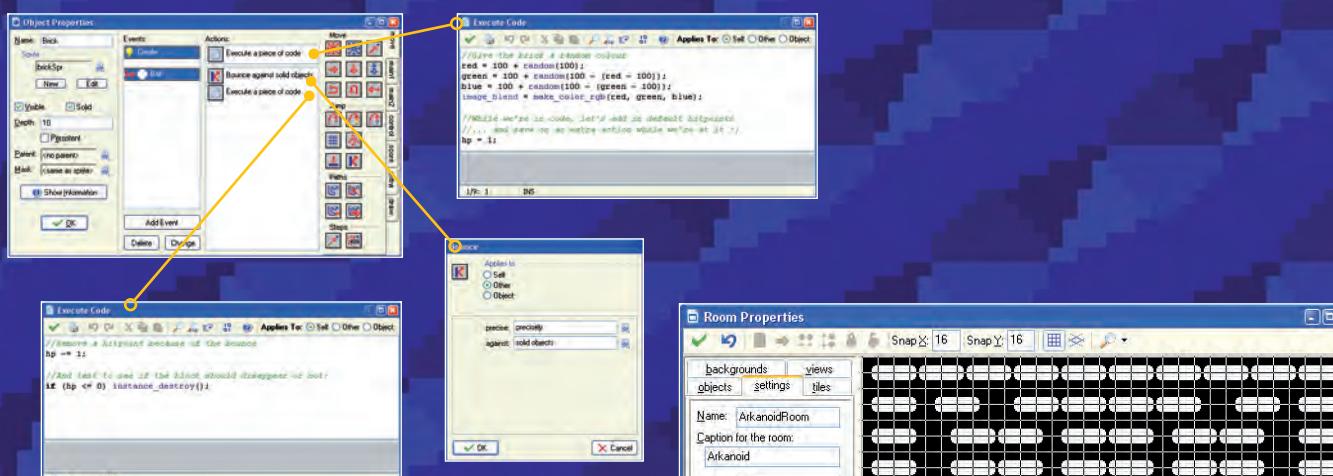
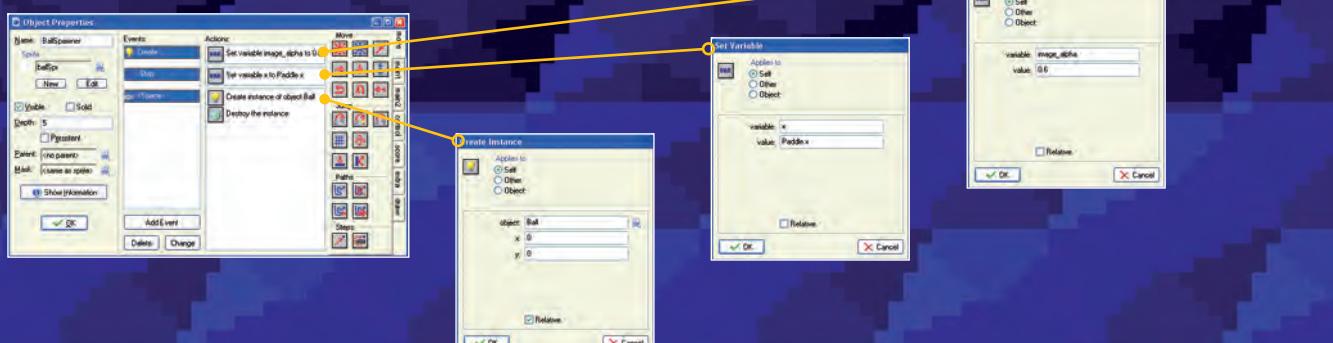
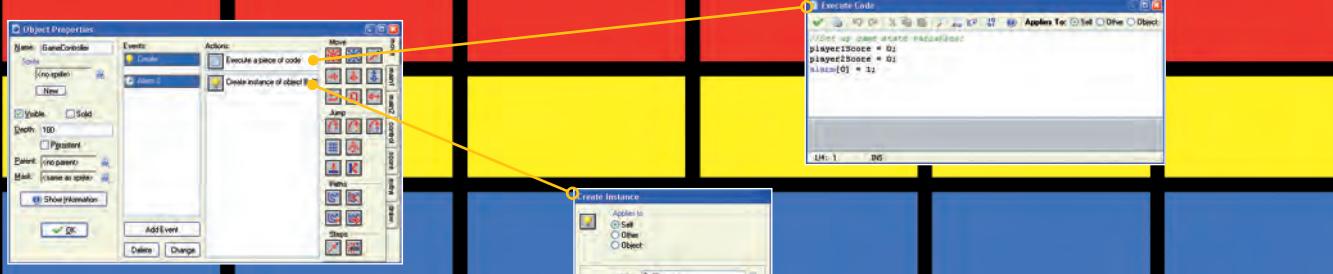
simply 'Bricks'. Once you've got the basics in place by following the pictures, you'll be able to add in new bricks and give them funky behaviours by simply inheriting from the parent Brick. Try adding typical power-ups like making the paddle bigger for a limited time, multiple balls, etc.

Those of you with a good memory will notice that some of the logic has been ripped out of

the previous *PONG* example; well spotted and welcome to the joys of object orientation! Other bits of cleverness include how Brick makes Ball bounce using only one collision event and the way Bricks uses image-blend to change the colour that their white sprite is drawn with.

As always, any requests, questions and even criticism should be sent to the helpful people at <http://www.gamedotdev.co.za>.





TIBERIUM WARS

MILITARY ACADEMY

REINFORCEMENTS HAVE ARRIVED: NEW OBJECTIVES RECEIVED

WELCOME TO THIS REFRESHER course, Commander. In this briefing, we'll discuss cooperative tactics that can be of use when you are engaged in joint operations with an allied army. We'll be assuming that such engagements will also feature an enemy alliance.

PLAYING YOUR PART

Within an alliance, it is commonplace for each member to assume a specialised role, far more so than in single engagements. Whereas when operating without backup, you need to cover all the bases yourself, in joint operations you can rely on allies to fill specific roles. The first and crucial fact here is proper planning. To this end, right at the beginning of the engagement, or even before, whenever possible, everyone's roles should be clearly delineated. This includes who'll be the overall commanding officer – this is essential, as there needs to be a single overarching battle plan. Yes, each sub-commander has autonomy, but an overall leader is a good idea.

Within each role, it becomes possible to super-micromanage the unit assortment, as there are now fewer unit types to mind. Thus, whereas you might usually group your infantry into one command group, or into anti-infantry and anti-armour groups, the specialised infantry player can assign individual numbers to more diverse unit types, or to smaller tactical squads, as well as to support units such as transports (APCs, for example).

Armour: This is the main assault force and is usually comprised predominantly of main battle tanks. The armoured division excels at tearing up enemy bases, and holds its own in most combat, but tends to be vulnerable when facing air and massed infantry. The armoured division should be placed near the frontlines, so as to be able to reinforce the battle as often as possible. It is not uncommon, and generally advisable, to back up the tanks with anti-infantry and anti-air units, such as APCs, Raider Buggies, or Gun Walkers. The armour commander should remember that his tanks' treads are a great weapon against enemy infantry.

Infantry: The infantry division backs up the armour and provides a high-firepower-to-cost ratio. However, the units are commensurately fragile. Once again, being a ground-based force and thus limited to movement dictated by the terrain, it should be based up front. The infantry player should keep in mind that, when properly micromanaged, specialist units are doubly effective, so snipers and equivalents, commandos, and engineer units, can become extremely effective. Whenever possible, prioritise research items that



SPEAKING OF COMMUNICATION

- Announce your expansion plans as early as possible. This will help to allocate a team's expansion points. It also makes it easier for your team mates to help defend your expansion base during its vulnerable stages, and to advance the front lines in an orderly fashion;
- Always make sure everyone is up to speed on their roles when about to initiate an assault. In joint operations, timing is crucial;
- Update your allies whenever a new technology becomes available to you. This serves several purposes. Most obviously, your allies will be aware of what you have available to deploy on the battlefield. Secondly, it may help a comrade to determine whether he or she is developing too fast or too slow. Also, constantly updating your allies regarding your developments (and them doing likewise), helps the entire team to keep track of the evolving battlefield situation. Don't worry if you don't remember every specific detail, that's not what this is about. The goal here is to have a general grasp of the overall situation;
- DO NOT be shy about calling for help! At the very least, your allies will know that enemy troops are committed to attacking you, and will be able to act accordingly; and
- Alert your comrades to any threats you detect. For example, if you spot a couple of air transports sneaking around the edge of the map, they are likely looking to execute a surgical strike. Alert your team mates so that they are not caught off guard and can take the appropriate countermeasures.

A clear chain of command is essential

will toughen your troops, and particularly technology that speeds up their movement (such as the Tiberium Infusion). Don't neglect transportation options – APCs, for example, and aerial transports add great flexibility to your force.

Air wing: This division's aim is to take control of the skies above the battle and to provide both tactical air support (Venoms eliminating enemy infantry, for example, or Orcas reducing enemy heavy armour) and high-impact surgical strikes against key targets (for example, bombing Obelisks of Light or Sonic Emitters using Stealth Bombers or Firehawks.) GDI is not, generally, very well suited to this role, as its aircraft

have no battlefield presence, having to rearm at the base after every payload*, but can still carry out repeated air strikes. This role is particularly suited to the overall force commander, as the air force player will have better access to overhead intel. This broader perspective lends itself well to directing the ground forces from above, as well as for accurately timing critical air strikes. The air force is also usually the first to be up and running with a super weapon.

Special Ops: This arm is comprised of the sneakier elements and is ideal for taking advantage of commanders' preoccupation during a stalled battlefield situation. While everyone is engaged in a grind, the special

THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

When a member of your alliance is under attack and calls for help, the most natural response is to rush to his or her aid. This is usually the correct action, as losing a team mate means you will then be outnumbered – a bleak prospect indeed. However, there are times when a comrade being attacked is an opportunity. The situation sometimes arises when your comrade is under attack, which means that enemy resources and attention [which should be treated as a resource] are committed there. At such times, depending on the location of your forces, it may be advantageous to take this opportunity to mount a decisive counterattack.

When to do this: when your forces are nearer to enemy bases than to your beleaguered colleague; when your comrade is absorbing damage from two or more opponents and is making his or her life difficult. How to capitalise: execute a strike against a dominant opponent's base or, even better, two bases. The idea here is to gain a numerical advantage by trading a comrade for two enemies. Ideally, if the counterattack goes really well and fast, and your besieged ally manages to hold out, you may be able to eliminate the threat against him/her by eliminating the aggressors' bases and ending their involvement.

Don't take this decision lightly though. If the gains are not worth it, or if it would be easier to rush to your comrade's aid, rather back them up.

THE DIVERSIONARY MAIN ASSAULT

Given that the most natural response to an ally being attacked is to rush to their aid, there is a move that can cripple your opposition. Let us, for argument's sake, assume that there are three commanders a side in this engagement. Have two on your team attack one opponent, with the third holding position on the opposite side of the map. Then, once two of the opponents' bases have been emptied to support the third, hit one of them with the reserve force. Given that the combined double-army arrives simultaneously at the original target, this will offset the eventual numerical disadvantage (original target plus two supporting armies arriving at different times). Meanwhile, the third army can engage a largely undefended base. This may result in that base's controller being torn by indecision: to continue helping a team mate [bearing in mind that the army may not even have reached there yet] or to turn back. Either way, you rob your enemy of time.

ops team can get in somewhere critical and decisively swing the battle. While able to operate with almost complete autonomy, the special ops team should nevertheless still communicate as much as possible with the other divisions. This element's effectiveness can be maximised by having the main assault assets engaging the enemy's attention; conversely, special ops can run diversionary tactics that can distract from a crushing main assault.

Support: This role doesn't have a high degree of definition in *Tiberium Wars*, given the nature of the units and the difficulty involved in repairing allied troops. Nevertheless, it is still possible for a player to provide artillery support or to deploy Battle Bases and Reconstruction

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

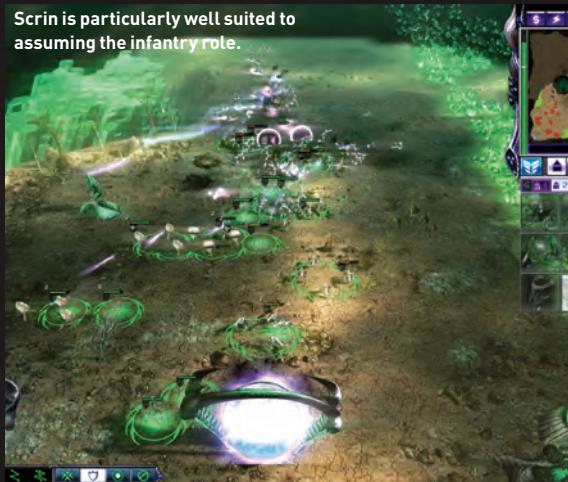
SHARING TERRITORY

As of relatively recently, it is possible to build within a portion of a comrade's zone of ground control. This fact can be exploited in at least two important ways. Firstly, you can deploy production facilities at your ally's base, which can be great for reinforcing that position, should it be necessary. Secondly, you can deploy defensive structures that complement theirs. One of the best applications of this is to deploy Scrin Storm Columns, which are powerful and versatile, significantly fortifying your ally's base.

When last did you see a cloaked GDI base



Scrin is particularly well suited to assuming the infantry role.



Whenever arriving to assist a comrade, try to gain a positional advantage. Thus, while it may take some [often precious] seconds longer, it is usually a good idea to circle around in order to hit the enemy from the flank while he/she is busy in a head-on engagement. You will inflict ruinous losses on your enemy, and turn the tide of the battle.



LOOK FOR SYNERGIES

There are many latent synergies between the different factions. Here we'll illustrate just one, showing you the sort of thing you should be on the lookout for. When one member of an alliance is Scrin, that player can, at some point, deploy Growth Accelerators at his/her comrades' resource nodes. Yes, it costs 1,500 per Accelerator, but in the long run, the benefit outweighs this cost. This is an example of how a commander should think of the good of the alliance rather than what's best for him/herself. To quote a cliché: the whole can [and should!] be more than the sum of its parts!



Drones to aid allies. It is generally not viable for a commander to assume this role exclusively, unless there are four members in the alliance. The support commander, even more so than any other, should keep an eye on allied bases and warn of intrusions, as well as aiding with allies' defences.

While a force comprised of specialised components is, in its purest and most perfect form, more effective than one consisting of an amalgamation of multi-role armies, it can only succeed when its individual elements act in concert. This highlights a crucial aspect of joint operations: COMMUNICATION IS KEY! Furthermore, as mentioned previously, a clear chain of command is also essential.

A very important tool for team communication is the beacon. Use these wisely – don't over-deploy them as this clutters the mini map. Always clearly announce the significance of a beacon as you deploy it. Beacons are great for targeting super weapons on locations that your team mates have no line-of-sight to. The overall leader should be the player making heaviest use of beacons. Once a beacon's significance has expired, its owner should delete it.

The important thing to remember in a team engagement is that there are more of you than just you. A successful team has no room for glory boys!

Dismissed! NAG

* This will change once the *Kane's Wrath* expansion is released around March or April. From then on, GDI will field one of the best high-presence aerial units in the game, the Hammerhead Gunship.



MOVIE NEWS

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Wanted

Director: Timur Bekmambetov
Cast: James McAvoy, Morgan Freeman, Angelina Jolie
Genre: Action
Release: April 08 (US)

LAST MONTH WE REVIEWED *Wanted*, a graphic novel about a man who discovers his lineage - that of being the world's best assassin. It's a really good read, good enough that someone felt it would make a good movie. We're inclined to agree, except that *Wanted*'s subject matter and theme are perhaps a tad too dark for the big screen.

That issue seems to have been solved, unfortunately. If the *Wanted* trailer is anything to go by, the movie should boast the much more murky 'inspired by' than anything else. Whereas the graphic novel tells the story of a man joining a fraternity of super villains who have secretly been ruling the world for a while, the movie appears to cast James McAvoy as a miserable office worker who gets introduced to a guild of assassins. This guild's job is to kill the bad people so that good people don't have to - basically a vigilante peace force.

Perhaps the trailer is being deceptive, but this is not the story behind *Wanted*. The most startling difference between the two the trailer presents is a scene from early on in the book, where lead character Wes meets the

assassin Fox (played by Angelina Jolie). In the graphic novel she makes her point by killing everyone in the coffee shop. In the movie it appears she is fighting an evil assassin or something. Basically, the movie is going to side step the dark, cynic material that made *Wanted* such a great read, opting for contrived 'hardcore good guy' morals instead.

That really is a wasted opportunity. But assuming the graphic novel didn't exist and *Wanted* was just another Hollywood script, it still doesn't look that interesting. There certainly appear to be lots of action shots and loads of gunplay as assassins go after assassins. Thus, *Wanted* appears to follow the gospel of Jerry Bruckheimer, mixing loud music with technically awesome camera work and at least one scene of someone running slow-mo, firing a gun.

Chances are that as an action movie it will be a fun, quick watch. The real question is how mature *Wanted* will be. The comic is violent and crude, so any attempt to make the movie for a teenage audience will miss the point. Alas, that seems to be where it's heading. Certainly don't expect another comic adaptation where you can see the frames replicated to an astonishing degree. This looks more like someone paid for the rights and then set about to do their own thing. So *Wanted* can be great action fodder, but paint us much less eager for its pending release.





Iron Man

Director: Jon Favreau
Cast: Robert Downey Jr., Terrence Howard, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jeff Bridges
Genre: Action
Release: May 2008 (US)

IT IS OUR HUMBLE opinion that Stan Lee is trying to either get all his comics made into movies before he dies, or he's hoping to get the record for the most cameos in movies. Marvel has certainly had a lot of success with its films, so much so that it has inspired DC to pull up its socks. Marvel has apparently formed its own movie division so that it can get a larger share of the profits. At times it seems that we need to stop Stan - especially after sitting through 'masterpieces' like *Ghost Rider* and *Daredevil*. But we can wait at least until *Iron Man* is out and strutting its stuff. In the movie, Robert Downey Jnr. plays Tony Stark, the billionaire industrialist who makes weapons for a living. While the original *Iron Man* built his suit to fight his own cancer, in the movie Stark constructs the suit to get away from terrorists who want him to build a missile. But that's just the beginning and later the suit's fans are familiar with tears across the sky, being chased by jets and hopefully off to beat up lots of bad guys.

As with any Marvel movie, it's hard to say if this will be a hit or miss. The trailers always tend to look great, but often the movies are



not. With large doses of melodrama and a ridiculous reliance on special effects, the films also tend to abuse the source material quite a lot and what you end up with is watered down. But that's not always the case and with Robert Downey Jnr. in the lead, things could be interesting. Then again, we also like Nicholas Cage. Just don't ask us to watch *Ghost Rider* again...

Hitman

Director: Xavier Gens
Cast: Timothy Olyphant, Dougray Scott, Olga Kurylenko
Genre: Action
Release: December 07

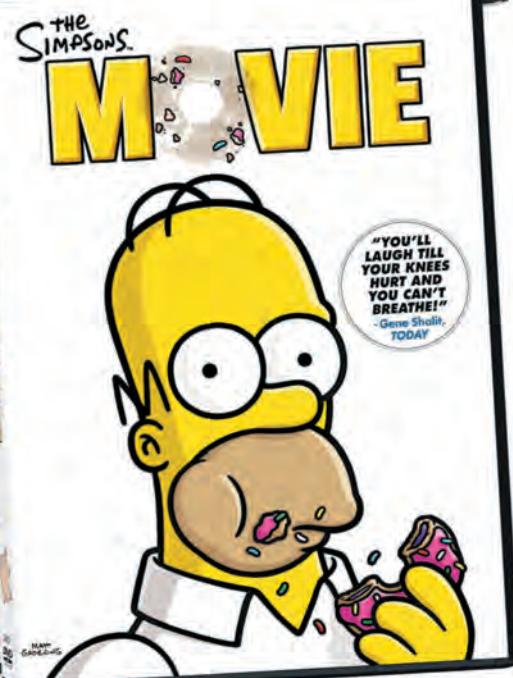
RECENTLY, *HITMAN* WAS IN the middle of a bit of a rumour scandal. Someone reported that Fox had decided it's too violent and sent in the cleaners to produce a nice PG-13 movie. This turned out to be false and *Hitman* will maintain its mature credentials. That would be the more logical choice: after all, not a single one of the *Hitman* games are not rated Mature and all love a certain degree of violence.

Good material for a movie, though. Assassin movies are always popular, but they can often be hit or miss. The biggest issue is usually around the morality of the killer. The main assassin is a nice guy who kills bad people, but then bad assassins go after him. *Hitman* fans will know this isn't exactly the plot of the games and that Agent 47 pretty much kills whoever he is paid to kill. Also, the company he works/works for was in it for the money. In the movie, 47 is portrayed as a killer specially bred from "the world's deadliest criminals" who works for a secret religious sect and is tasked with



killing the bad people in the world. Our money says somewhere down the line he figures out the church group are the bad people and he has to kill them. If that all sounds pretty done-before, it really is. Then again, *Hitman* hardly had much of a story until later into the series, so the producers had to come up with something. Pity it all looks like one big cliché, though we're eager to see the intense Timothy Olyphant (*Deadwood*) do his thing. Sure, he seems a bit young for the role, but that might be the least of *Hitman*'s problems.

THE SIMPSONS MOVIE



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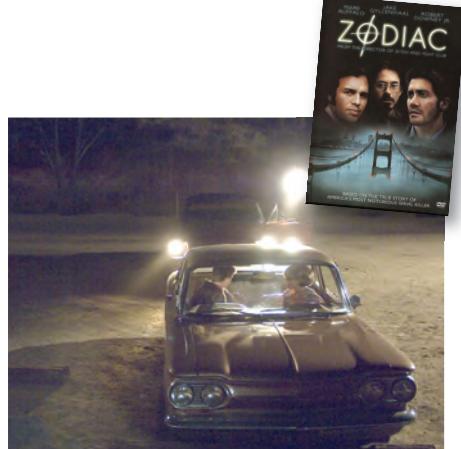
Zodiac

Director: David Fincher
Cast: Jake Gyllenhaal, Mark Ruffalo, Robert Downey Jr.
Genre: Thriller
Rating: 13 LV
Score: ★★★★

DURING THE LATE SIXTIES, five murders in North Carolina and San Francisco were committed by a serial killer who identified himself as Zodiac. The killer sent letters, including ones written in code, to newspapers and caught the public's imagination as a modern-day bogeyman. He took credit for several more murders and the unofficial tally stands at over thirty, but no more than the five were properly linked to him. Some speculate he even simply took credit for other murders he read about. The police were unable to solve the cases and catch the killer, but this was during a time when forensic evidence and other means to track a killer weren't nearly as advanced as in recent times. Eventually the killer disappeared and though several suspects were looked at, the trail went cold. Recently two movies surfaced about the topic. This one is by far the better, though it does so by preying less on the fear of the moment and instead focusing on the story around the story and how the main people - a police investigator,



a newspaper cartoonist and a journalist - were affected. Apparently a lot of research went into the film and it tries to give a factual account of what happened. Obviously that isn't completely the case - the movie already sits at two and a half hours, but it captures events from nearly two decades. The whole thing might have been a bust if it wasn't for a stellar cast and one strong director. *Zodiac* is the latest work of David Fincher, better known for *Se7en* and *Fight Club*. Though he returns to serial killers in this film, his style is much more of a dramatic retelling



than the intensity of his earlier films. Though still solid, it works best thanks to Robert Downey Jr., Jake Gyllenhaal and Mark Ruffalo as the three main people who get spun into the mystery. But in the end, it seems very, very long. Also, even though the last part of the movie involves the cartoonist unravelling most of the Zodiac's identity, it ends up being someone they had suspected already. Obviously they don't get their guy (as it's based on a true story), but it's an interesting bit of modern American history. Indulge in for a while. **JF**

Deck the Halls

Director: John Whitesell
Cast: Danny DeVito, Matthew Broderick, Kristin Davis, Kristin Chenoweth
Genre: Comedy
Rating: PG
Score: ★★

HERE'S A CHEESY FEEL-GOOD Christmas movie that should only be 'enjoyed' with the whole family during the run up to Christmas day. Watching it out of season isn't the best idea, because you really need to be up to your eyeballs in festive cheer to squeeze any enjoyment out of it. Two dads clash when one of them [DeVito] tries to get his house seen from space by lighting it up with thousands of Christmas lights. Although the premise is a good start for the movie, it never evolves past polite acts of sabotage or devolves into anything really nasty, unless throwing a snowball at a circuit breaker qualifies here. Somewhere in-between, you'll

lose interest and be grateful when the tacky ending finally snuffs the lights out. Most of the laughs come from simple slapstick antics including camel poo and people falling down. It also won't appeal to younger kids because there isn't enough fantasy or fun. Broderick is poorly cast in this and doesn't play up to DeVito, and all along you keep wondering if a different actor might have jazzed things up a bit. In terms of extras, there are some interviews, deleted scenes and bloopers (ironically two of the deleted scenes would have actually added to the movie). Ultimately the whole 'extras' bundle feels a little tacked on and lacks diversity and substance. This is a wasted opportunity and would have been much more fun if it had some teeth to it (even the tame kind of action in something like *Home Alone* would have been adequate), but as a made for America feel-good Christmas movie, you're going to get exactly what you expect: camel poo and snowballs. **MJ**

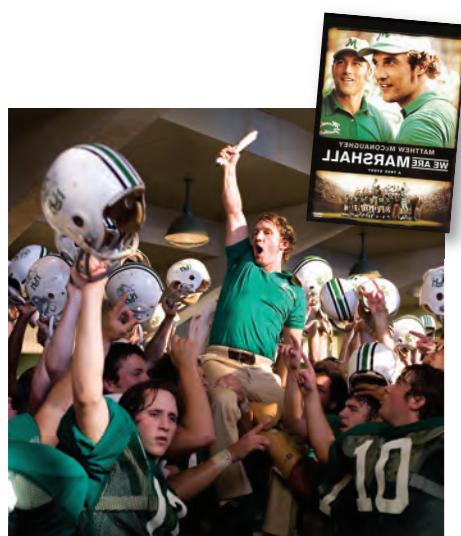


We Are Marshall

Director: McG
Cast: Matthew McConaughey, Matthew Fox, Ian McShane, Anthony Mackie, Kate Mara, January Jones, Brian Geraghty
Genre: True-life drama
Rating: All
Score: ★★★

"A TRUE STORY" - these words send a shudder down my spine if they presage a movie that I cannot avoid watching. The story recounts a tragic time in a small American town in 1971, when after a narrow defeat, its university's college football team is almost wiped out in a fatal aircraft crash, along with a number of the town's leading residents. The school's football programme is in danger of being shut down, but the determined efforts of the local population result in a heroic effort. As is to be expected in such a story, we see the usual assortment of dramatic clichés, such as the doubters who will not believe

that it is possible, and various little interpersonal issues. All this is accompanied by a violin-ridden soundtrack. This alternates with supposedly 'rousing' or 'inspirational' sequences, with heavy abuse of slow motion (you know it is overdone when even playing the sequences at 3x speed they still look slow!). All too much of the film, furthermore, depicts college football scenes, both in training and in matches. These suffer badly from the heavy-handed slow motion. The American football theme is rather out of here in this country, so the movie should be judged on its other merits. Fans of this sort of drama will no doubt enjoy this one, but the majority of the population is advised to look elsewhere! Bonus features on the DVD are scant: besides the usual scene selection, there is a theatrical trailer and some documentary material on the people the story is based on. Like we haven't already seen enough! **AJ**



The Jungle Book (40th Anniversary Edition)



Director: Wolfgang Reitherman

Cast: Phil Harris, Sebastian Cabot, George Sanders, Sterling Holloway, Louis Prima

Genre: Animated

Rating: All

Score: ★★★★

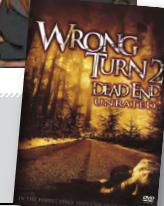
THE ORIGINAL JUNGLE BOOK stories by

Rudyard Kipling - three of which detailed the life and times of a boy raised by wolves called Mowgli - were dark, gritty fables filled with violence, death and worst of all, moral lessons. The Walt Disney animated feature film based on the stories surrounding Mowgli is a much more light-hearted affair, but not entirely free of pathos. *The Jungle Book* remains to this day one of Disney's most popular films and is considered by current Disney animators as the epitome of Disney character animation.

The 40th Anniversary Edition, like most of

the Special Editions released from Disney of late, contains a host of features on the second disc: deleted songs, the making of and more. For the immense amount of background information and trivia, these features alone are well worth the price of admission. *The Jungle Book* holds an especially poignant place in the hearts of Disney aficionados, for it was the last animated feature produced by Walt Disney (who died during its production in 1966).

For the kids, there is a host of games and activities that include a virtual tour through the jungle and a trivia section that teaches you about the various real-life animals from the film. The older generation may want to avoid the all-new *I Wan'a Be Like You* music video by the Jonas Brothers on the first disc. It has been known to cause fatal heart attacks due to the sheer intensity of its horribleness. **MD**



Wrong Turn 2

Director: Joe Lynch

Cast: Erica Leerhsen, Henry Rollins, Texas Battle

Genre: Horror

Rating: 18 BPV

Score: ★★★

HORROR SEQUELS ARE LIKE knock-off rice

crispies - usually not a good idea, but you get them anyway. Every now and then, though, you get rice pops or toasted crispies that are pretty good. It's not as good as the real thing, but it doesn't leave a bad taste in your mouth. Horror sequels also happen upon this niche from time to time. That's where I'd place this sequel to a hit from a few years ago. *Wrong Turn* had its moments of guts, but this sequel - which has nothing to do with the original - really pours it on thick and is definitely one parents should say no

to. There are a few tangents that tie the two films together: a group of people - this time participants and crew of a reality TV pilot - get taken out by local mutated cannibal hillbillies. One by one the cast, including cult musician and comedian, Henry Rollins, gets picked off in very gross ways. It all comes down to the final survivors running through the forest. Will they survive?

The script and most of the scenes are complete bunk and sometimes just downright silly. But the gore effects and some of the camera work are plain genius. First-time director Joe Lynch certainly had fun and horror fans will get a kick out of his geeky knowledge in the commentary. Other special features tone the package up. But only get this if you are a fan of splatter horror. **JF**



HITMAN



PlayStation.2



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Die Hard 4.0

Director: Len Wiseman

Cast: Bruce Willis; Timothy Olyphant; Justin Long; Maggie Q

Genre: Action

Rating: 13 LV

Score: ★★★★

TAKE AN ABOVE-AVERAGE PLOT, excuse the silly bits, add an über-sexy super hacker (Maggie Q), action, explosions, more action, impossible scenarios, some more clever hackers, and the US's most-effective and well-hidden weapon of mass destruction, Bruce Willis (ICBM John McClane), and you have an awesome, adrenalin-filled, hold-onto-your-seat action film. Add one more ingredient, witty McClane one-liners, and you have not only one of the best action DVD releases of the year, but probably the last three years.

McClane kicks ass; McClane's the man; McClane will drive Chuck Norris to tears; McClane will take on The 300 and tie their underwear in a knot; and, in one awesome scene, McClane takes out a helicopter in mid air using a police squad car because he's "out of bullets" (awesome!).

It's Independence Day weekend in the US and someone hacks into the computers at the FBI's Cyber Crime Division. Not knowing who's responsible

for this attack, the FBI Director decides to round up every hacker who could have pulled off this stunt. Because it's long weekend, the FBI is short staffed and it's up to local detectives to do the job. Unfortunately for the cyber-terrorist group responsible for the hack (as the viewer will later find out), Detective John McClane is tasked with bringing a hacker named Farrell (who inadvertently wrote a piece of code needed for the 'fire sale') to the FBI for questioning. However, McClane's not the only one on his way to pick up Farrell. Cyber-terrorist, Thomas Gabriel (Olyphant), sends his henchmen to take out Farrell and inadvertently unleashes the WMD that is McClane on New York. The result is a thrill-a-minute, over-the-top cinematic joyride of epic proportions.

In order to save the US from Gabriel's 'fire sale' (systematically shutting down the country's power, telecommunications and financial institutions, and causing massive public panic), McClane has to pull out all the stops. And he does this with a vengeance.

Die Hard 4.0 is a stunning action film full of surprises and is highly recommended. To summarise: one stunning, super-sexy über hacker, a 'fire sale', and a weapon of mass destruction on a mission, equal action by the bucket loads! Enough said. **ND**



The Reaping

Director: Stephen Hopkins

Cast: Hilary Swank, David Morrissey, Idris Elba, Annasophia Robb, Stephen Rea

Genre: Thriller

Rating: 13V

Score: ★★★

HAVE YET TO DECIDE whether I consider this a truly good film, or not, but I know one thing for sure – I thoroughly enjoyed watching it, and not only thanks to Hilary Swank's presence! Without giving too much away (I save plot spoilers for movies I consider rubbish, and this is not one of them), a woman who specialises in debunking accounts of miracles is called into a small and obscure Bible Belt town called Haven, where the local river has turned red to investigate this occurrence. The story that unfolds involves a young girl, who may be possessed or worse, and a revisit of the ten Biblical plagues from Exodus. Throughout

the film, the atmosphere swings from the stark and gritty to the surreal. The overall artistic style is quite immersive, and the locations that were used in the filming are generally interesting. The acting is unexceptional, but neither is it bad – just middle-of-the-road adequate. The overall story may be a tad convoluted and self-contradictory, and I wonder whether a character stating that very fact within the movie is a cheap dodge, but nevertheless it is entertaining and somewhat intriguing. In short, this is an escapist yarn, decked in an impressive visual style. The DVD's special features section includes some behind-the-scenes footage and cast commentary, as well as a 15-minute documentary to do with current scientific theories regarding the Biblical plagues that *The Reaping* is inspired by. **AJ**



Stargate: Ultimate Edition

Director: Roland Emmerich

Cast: Kurt Russell, James Spader

Genre: Science Fiction

Rating: PG V

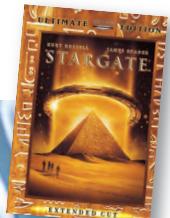
Score: ★★★★

IF YOU'VE SEEN STARGATE already (and you're a fan) there are several fine reasons to buy this Ultimate Edition. You might be surprised to find that the standard movie now contains a large amount of formerly cut footage. This footage rounds off the movie, changes the tone of certain plot threads and really completes what was perhaps an imperfect movie (which might explain the lukewarm but heartfelt reception it received in theatrical release).

The commentary track is exceptional, with writer/

producer Dean Devlin and director Roland Emmerich reminiscing fondly about various things behind the scenes as well as elaborating on why they did certain things the way they did. It's quite a lot of fan service but doesn't feel like it was for the sake of cash.

If you've never seen *Stargate*, it really is a meeting of *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*. The adventure is epic, the science is far out yet believable and Kurt Russell always looks like he's on the verge of crying, yet utterly man enough to never actually cry. Originally intended as a trilogy, (Dean and Roland went on to create *Independence Day* instead), *Stargate* remains the better movie, if only for James Spader in his role as Dr. Daniel Jackson, who proved it's okay to be a geek. **MD**



Tekkonkinkreet

Director: Michael Arias
Cast: Kazunari Ninomiya, Yu Aoi, Min Tanaka
Genre: Animated
Rating: 13V
Score: ★★★★

THE TITLE IS PUN on "Tekkin Concrete", the Japanese term for reinforced concrete. This feature-length Japanese anime film by Michael Arias and Studio 4°C comes from the same creative mix that made the short-film in *The Animatrix* about that house with the "glitch" in the system. This story takes place in the fictional town of "Treasure City" and focuses on a pair of street kids, Black and White. Known collectively as

"Cats", they prowl the city enacting vigilante justice on whoever threatens their city.

Anime is a style that often uses visual concepts to represent metaphorical concepts. Black and White can float, fly, jump and do kung-fu not because they're super kids (or perhaps they are), but because those abilities represent the freedoms they enjoy in a life free of pathos. When White experiences a particularly complicated tragedy, those powers are lost to him while Black, the cause of the tragedy, suddenly changes in ways that would only make sense if you follow the metaphor.

A lot of feature-length anime gets misunderstood as being aimed at kids or as being "just plain crazy".



but *Tekkonkinkreet* has the benefit of a director with more understandable Western sensibilities, which helps in a movie that is as far-East as this (the movie is based on a popular series of manga in Japan). The special features include an interesting production diary. **MD**

Wild Hogs

Director: Walt Becker
Cast: Tim Allen, Doug Madsen, John Travolta, William H. Macy, Ray Liotta, Marisa Tomei
Genre: Comedy
Rating: 10+ (L/V)
Score: ★★

MIDLIFE CRISIS IS A dreaded time in anyone's life. It's bound to happen to everyone and may sometimes lead to weird decisions and circumstances. What do you do when you're a dentist with a 'perfect' family and your life bores you because you're boring? What if your supermodel wife is leaving you and your life slowly starts falling apart? What if your wife henpecks you, your oldest daughter disses you and your mother-in-

law is a nagging old hag. What do you do if you're a shy computer geek who's single because you don't have the nerve to chat up a chick?

Our four losers, realising the inevitable (that it's time for change), decide to go on a week-long road trip on their motorcycles (they call their 'clan' the Wild Hogs) and do something dangerous and exciting to reawaken their reason for being. They get on their bikes and head west. During their search for adventure and excitement, they cross paths with a hardcore motorcycle gang, the Del Feugos (lead by Ray Liotta). And this is where this flick falls apart.

Before meeting the Del Feugos, the film is slow and silly with a lot of time spent on homophobic



jokes. However, after meeting the gang, the flick gets downright silly, spoiling everything.

While *Wild Hogs* features a laundry list of top-notch actors, the film doesn't give the actors the potential to shine (it's a silly flick after all). Macy has some average to good moments, while Marisa Tomei is great (albeit for a brief period) as a small-town café owner. **ND**

Barnyard

Director: Steve Oedekerk
Cast: Kevin James, Jeff Garcia, Tino Insana, Courteney Cox, Rob Paulsen
Genre: Animated
Rating: PG
Score: ★★★★

IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED Steve Oedekerk's work (*Kung Pow*, various "thumb" movies), then you surely know that here we have a man who is not afraid to show the world transsexual cows having life choice issues. *Barnyard* follows Otis, a "male cow" and his friends through a rather convoluted plot involving a pregnant love interest, a ferret in the carnivore closet,

and a very confused if slightly concussed farmer. One shouldn't expect a decent plot from a movie that looks like this - it looks like a standard computer-generated kids movie - but Oedekerk's fine touch permeates through the fabric of the film. The major crux of the plot revolves around the death of Otis's father near the beginning of the movie and then blossoms outward from there.

The special features contain a host of deleted scenes - some of which should have actually made it into the movie from the looks of them. There is commentary by Oedekerk, which is well worth your time if you're a fan of the movie.



Barnyard may have missed some attention it rightly deserves by being misrepresented as a kids' movie (just like the fantastic *Hoodwinked*). If your superego can handle the visuals, *Barnyard* is a heartfelt metaphor that one could easily appreciate. **MD**

House of 1000 Corpses

Director: Rob Zombie
Cast: Karen Black, Erin Daniels, Sid Haig, Chris Hardwick
Genre: Horror
Rating: 18LV
Score: ★★

ABUNCH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS go around the back roads of Texas to find road-side attractions. They happen upon a small museum where they learn more about the legend of Doctor Satan. Morbid curiosity leads them to a local ranch where they encounter the Firefly family, a bunch of killers who take a lot of joy in hunting and terrorising their victims. Here begins the directing career of Rob Zombie, the frontman

of *White Zombie* and all-round B-grade movie fan. Zombie has since moved on to much better projects, but this was the film that made him a cult figure and someone to watch in the film world. Zombie's directing saves what can really only be called random. From when the victims arrive, it's really just a cascading amount of events that at any point seem to be leading somewhere. But this isn't the case and the movie devolves into a mish-mash of scary freakiness. Eventually the 'legendary' Dr. Satan shows up for a bit scene, then it all ends. Ultimately, if you don't get into the groove *1000 Corpses* wants you to feel, the whole movie just goes over (or under) your head. The sequel was a completely different and much



better film, so perhaps this gave Zombie a chance to get a bit of the cheesy stuff out of his system. Strictly for cult horror fans. **JF**

Dead Silence

Director: James Wan
Cast: Ryan Kwanten, Amber Valletta, Donnie Wahlberg, Bob Gunton
Genre: Horror
Rating: 16V
Score: ★★

YOU CAN EXPECT TWO kinds of horror out there: for mature audiences and what is meant to frighten the younger viewer. On occasion, a ratings board gets it wrong and confuses a lack of gory images as reasons why a film is game for a lower rating, which is not the case with some of the ghost films on offer. What happened here is just the opposite. Despite the 16V rating and *Saw*'s creators being behind the

project, this leans much more towards younger horror fans. Either that or it's just plain stupid. It all starts innocently enough with a package arriving at a young couple's door. Inside it they find a creepy ventriloquist dummy. While the young hubby goes to get take-aways, his youthful bride gets killed by losing her tongue - literally. He suspects the creepy doll and soon figures out where it came from: his hometown. Onto the road and a mystery about a creepy lady in a nursery rhyme who will rip out your tongue if you scream. As he slowly unravels the mystery, more and more people die. Meanwhile, he is being pursued by a cop convinced the guy killed his own wife. If the story sounds ho-hum and



predictable, so are the scares. It's a standard ghost story, so expect creepy stuff to happen and then the old lady pops out of somewhere. On the flip-side, if you like your scares light and quick or you don't like overly bloody scenes, you can't go too wrong with this. But rent it instead. **JF**

Shooter

Director: Antoine Fuqua
Cast: Mark Wahlberg, Michael Peña, Danny Glover, Kate Mara
Genre: Action, Thriller
Rating: 13 LV
Score: ★★★★

WITH ALL OF THESE heavy crime dramas and intense action extravaganzas, one tends to forget that people still know how to make an action-packed thriller. Sure, they do come out often enough, but it's still a pleasant surprise to run into a really good one. Those don't come that often. It's a careful mix. If you go into too much action, your story starts to suffer. But if you give the story too much time, your

momentum and action take a dive. Obviously this film does a very good job with balancing the two sides, because it has a solid pace, very nice action and a believable and sensible story on top of it all. I'm sure you can find technical faults, but the story never rushes along or conveniently skips plot points, since it's a cat-and-mouse thriller. The action is intense thanks to the military theme, which the creators have gone to lengths to make believable. That means a lot of interesting sniper tactics and military trickery. It blends well and the actors, especially a villainous Danny Glover, work well with the material. The DVD features commentary and a making of. Shooter's



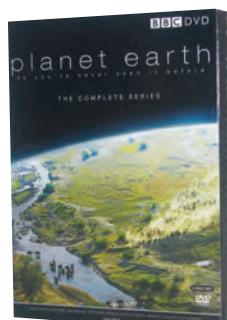
about a very good former marine sniper who gets framed by a Pentagon colonel for the assassination of an important person. The story is old, but the execution is fresh and smart. **JF**

Planet Earth

Director: Alastair Fothergill
Narration: David Attenborough
Genre: Documentary
Rating: All
Score: ★★★★☆

DEPENDING ON YOUR SCHOOL of thought, you might believe the planet is dying or in real danger. You might not. *NAG* is obviously concerned about the environment, which is why we try and take short breaks when we huff and puff about the office. Anything to lower your carbon footprint. But regardless of your position on the environment, you have to be some kind of cretin to not regard nature as pretty splendid. If you happen to know such a cretin, the best thing you can

do is buy it this box-set. It's the result of a long and expensive project by the BBC to capture nature like we've never seen it before - all over the globe. The eleven episodes each takes on a specific theme, such as seasonal forests, great planes or the oceans. Most of it was shot in high definition, so an HD version of this would probably be awesome. But this DVD has nothing to be shy about. The visuals are crisp and the camera work is astounding. After each episode a mini 'making of' takes you through one specific sequence the team had to shoot. In one case it was filming the elusive and very dangerous white-tip shark. Another used advanced filming equipment to get the first air footage of a wild dog pack hunting. These just make you appreciate the



episodes more. Nature documentaries have certain gotten better over the past few years, but this takes a huge step forward. If you only need to own one doccie DVD in your life, get this. **JF**

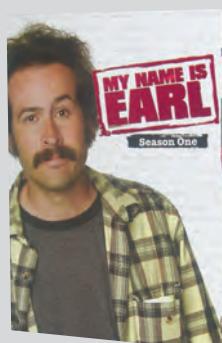
My Name Is Earl

Director: Gregory Thomas Garcia
Narration: Jason Lee, Ethan Suplee, Jaime Pressly, Eddie Steeples, Nadine Velazquez
Genre: TV Comedy
Rating: All
Score: ★★★★☆

EARL LEARNED THAT IF you keep doing bad stuff, bad things happen to you. He came to this conclusion after winning the lottery - and then being run over ten seconds later. While in hospital his wife divorces him and life seems worse than ever. But Earl is the lowest of low - the kind of guy who would, and probably did, steal candy from a baby. So, with the help of a clip on TV, Earl comes to learn about karma and that doing good things will bring you good luck. This convinces him

to make a list of everything bad he has done, a list he then proceeds to clear by making up for each bad deed. Thus, in every episode he goes after an item on the list, be it letting a friend go to jail for him, blowing up a small statue his ex owned or faking his own death to get out of a relationship.

Odds are that you've watched this excellent comedy on television. If you didn't, it's well worth the watch and one of the smartest and funniest comedies since *Arrested Development* departed from screens everywhere. Earl, played brilliantly by Jason Lee, and his oddball group of friends and enemies, his brother Randy with strange simpleton thoughts, trashy ex-wife Joy trying to kill him and professional thief Ralph setting fire to something. The box-set contains the entire first season, as well as



plenty of extras for fans. The cherry on the top of the special features is an alternative pilot, asking what would happen if Earl decided to make a list of everyone who screwed him over and then take revenge. Definitely a must for fans of good television. **JF**



MATT DAMON IS JASON BOURNE

A PAUL GREENGRASS FILM

THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM

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Q&A.

WORLD IN CONFLICT



ONE THEORY REGARDING STRATEGY IS TO APPROACH THINGS BY STUFFING SUPPLIES IN THE LOCAL BARN AND USING THESE TO FUEL PETTY SKIRMISHES. ANOTHER THEORY SUGGESTS THAT YOU SHOULD TAKE YOUR TIME, COUNT YOUR TURNS, AND THINK FAR AHEAD. HOWEVER, DEVELOPER MASSIVE IS CLEARLY MORE ALIGNED WITH THE THIRD THEORY OF DECIDING IT RIGHT THERE, RIGHT NOW. THE DEVELOPER HAS ALREADY SNUBBED CONVENTIONS WITH ITS GROUNDBREAKING GROUND CONTROL SERIES, PLACING ACTION ABOVE DIGGING FOR TURNIPS OR WHATEVER YOU DO IN STARCRAFT. NOW IT DOES SO AGAIN WITH THE SMASH HIT *WORLD IN CONFLICT*. JOHN BJÖRLING, COPYWRITER AT MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT, FILLS US IN...



Where did the idea for *World in Conflict* come from?

The idea came from our urge to develop something new that wasn't science fiction or anything similarly fictional. We were confident that we could develop a good strategy game, but we felt it was time to develop a game in a more realistic setting. In an ambition to try some new kind of setting, we crossed out World War II and other war settings. We started to think of the Cold War and the idea of letting them fight it out in a full-blown conflict; and now we're here.

Apparently the main development was handled by Swordfish and aided by Massive. Could you give us an idea of what responsibilities fell with which studio?

World in Conflict was wholly developed by Massive Entertainment, but Swordfish is currently working on a 360 version of the game. We have a very nice collaboration between the studios, and we try to give them all the help we can to make sure that the 360 version will be as good, if not better, as the PC version!

How long did it take to develop *World in Conflict*?

It took us roughly two and a half years.

So far, the game has scored very high! Clearly you must be happy with that. Is it what you expected?

We're very happy with all the reviews we've gotten! So far, it has definitely exceeded most of our expectations, but there was no doubt whether we'd develop a good game or not – we know it's good. We just hoped everyone else would see it as well!

Isn't there a risk of losing traditional players when moving a strategy game away from resource-based gameplay? Why did you opt for this approach?

Sure there's a risk, but we think that we make up for this by offering a very solid and



tactical experience with a lot of fun combat. Our multiplayer role system also makes it very interesting and unique, giving the game a complex team aspect that is not so present in most strategy games. We opted for this approach because we believed there would be others like us who wanted something fresh from the otherwise so conventional strategy genre.

It's more accurate to call *World in Conflict* an action game than pure strategy. Do you consider it a strategy game in the traditional sense, or is it an action title with a new approach?

Since we've taken a new approach to strategy games, it might be hard to label it according to conventions. I wouldn't really want to try to label it with any kind of new genre name or anything, but I guess you might get around it by saying that it's a very combat-focused strategy game.

Obviously, working inside a team is fine for multiplayer. However, how did you ensure that the AI of the single-player campaign was up to scratch?

We've had a very dedicated programmer who's focused completely on the AI. We've configured the AI according to which types of units it applies to, to make sure that the vehicles act in relation to their situation and their options. In the end, with a lot of polish and dedication, it's proven to be very effective.

Is the game's engine proprietary? Where does it come from? Was the intention to support DX10 there from the start?

Yes, it's our own engine and we developed it using the Ground Control 2 engine. The DX10 support came into the process, but after a few months of hard work we completely integrated it with the engine.

Why did you decide to include Xbox 360

support? Did this place extra strain on the game's development? Do you plan to expand to other platforms as well?

It felt like a natural thing to do since many gamers play on consoles exclusively. It didn't put extra strain on the PC version since it is developed by Swordfish, so the Massive team only had to really care about the PC version. We don't know if it'll become a multi-console game yet, but it's definitely something we're taking into account when we look at our options.

After taking a break and watching the sales

charts, what's the next step for your studio? We have a couple of ideas of where to go next, but we're keeping them under wraps for now!

Thanks for the answers! Is there anything you'd like to add?

Thanks! Just that we're very happy with people buying the game and letting us know what they think! This way we can make sure that the community gets everything it needs to make *World in Conflict* a game to keep playing and enjoy for a long time. **NAG**



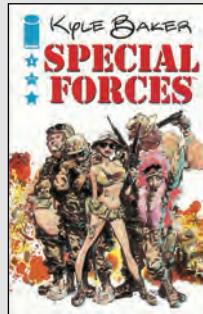
COMICS

Written by Clive Burmeister

SPECIAL FORCES (#1 OF 6)

Format: Comic Mini series
Publisher: Image
Writer: Kyle Baker
Artist: Kyle Baker
Price: R22.95

SPECIAL FORCES IS AN enjoyable and entertaining comic about the USA's military, written with an easy-to-read style that gets you into the scenario from the first page, and artwork that, although portraying some of the more gruesome sides of combat, doesn't take anything away from the story with the 'shock value' that a lot of comics go for these days. What is more outstanding about this comic, however, is that it's pretty honest about the botch-ups which many modern war scenarios become, not to mention bold in its descriptions of some of the other, not strictly lawful, practices that the military use, such as recruitment for soldiers into a war nobody wants to fight. Oh, and if that hasn't gotten you interested yet, let me mention that the main character is a female, whose uniform becomes one of the many casualties of war. With all this politics and politically incorrectness, you'll be surprised at how light it comes off. Like I said earlier, enjoyable and entertaining, but with enough food for thought included as well.



THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY #1

Format: Series
Publisher: Dark Horse Comics
Writer: Gerard Way
Artist: Gabriel Ba
Price: R35.00

THIS WAS GIVEN ON the notable point that the author is somehow also involved with My Chemical Romance. That's really a moot point: just because you have a band, does that mean you can write a comic? It turns out you can - or at least, the first issue of *The Umbrella Academy* is pretty good, though too short to form an opinion yet. The basic plot is interesting: at a certain point in time 48 babies were born at the same time, mostly somewhat miraculously. Not all of them survived, but an eccentric billionaire adopts the seven he could find. For ten years they are out of sight, then they return to save the world.

Going further will actually spoil the entire book's story, but it ends in a very curious way which definitely will make you want to check out Issue 2. The art style suits the quirky and dry humour of the writing perfectly. Speaking of which, the story already toys with a few interesting plot lines in this first issue. Going forward this might prove to be a deep and deeply funny series.



FOOKILLER (#1 OF 5)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Marvel MAX
Writer: Gregg Hurwitz
Artist: Ian Medina
Price: R32.50

MARVEL MAX BRINGS ANOTHER in-your-face comic of gratuitous violence and explicit content to the shelves in the form of *Foolkiller*. And who is this Foolkiller? A vigilante who preys on gang members, rapists, child molesters and thugs, fools all, and then murders them in brutal ways. More than that nobody knows, but Nate is trying to find out. Ex-football-player-turned-thug, Nate's lifestyle led to the death of one of his daughters and his wife, and now he has only two weeks to come up with twenty grand or he will lose his own life or that of his last daughter. And with this Foolkiller on the loose stalking him, Nate is feeling very foolish. This comic is really nice and gory (if you like that kind of thing), but with a gripping enough story to keep you interested in where things will lead. *Foolkiller* looks like it should be a good series. But keep in mind; it's not for sensitive readers!



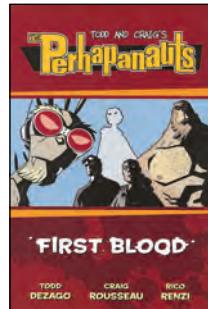
THE PERHAPANAUTS: FIRST BLOOD

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse Comics
Writer: Todd Dezago
Artist: Craig Rousseau
Price: R159

"THERE ARE PLACES IN this world where the fabric of reality has worn thin, where strange and terrible creatures have crossed over to lurk in the shadows and the night. There is an organisation dedicated to finding these creatures and sending them back from whence they came, sealing the rift behind them, and maintaining the integrity of those borders. The organisation is called BEDLAM. Its agents are... The Perhapanauts!"

It sounds so serious until you realise that these so-called 'agents' include a delinquent force-evolved (just enough to reach being capably stupid) chupacabra, a Yeti now at genius level, a teenage ghost, a psychic chick and a dude simply called "MG", may or may not be able to step through dimensions in time and space. It has horror, suspense, mystery and adventure all floating in a heady broth of enigmatic characters confronting myth and legend, but it's also quite mercifully stupid.

First Blood contains #1 through #4 of the original miniseries, which does have a follow up collection called *Second Chances*, which contains #1 through #4 of the miniseries of the same name. *Tellos* fans will want to check this out, as it's by the same creative duo (and it shows - the same imagination and quirky sense of humour from *Tellos* is much more brazen in *The Perhapanauts*).





ASTONISHING X-MEN VOLUME 1 - GIFTED

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Joss Whedon
Artist: John Cassaday
Price: R114.95

JOSSE WHEDON, THE CREATOR of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, brings a vast amount of insight and character depth to the *X-Men* in this series [who in my opinion have become a rather static group of heroes in many other *X-Men* titles]. His usual arsenal of witty comments and one liners are thrown into the mix during serious moments or as a break in the suspense; all combine together to make his writing on this project a masterpiece. In this Graphic Novel, collecting the first six issues of the series, Joss tells the story of how the *X-Men* try to turn the public opinion of mutants from such a negative light, and face the threat of a "mutant cure" at the same time. Although the "mutant cure" theme has a somewhat familiar sound to it, Joss focuses more on the characters and their own individual personalities rather than on the inevitable looming conflicts, and it only makes the story and action more real for that. The series is now past its twenty second issue and still going strong, giving its readers an excellent story, and influencing other comics and stories with its originality.



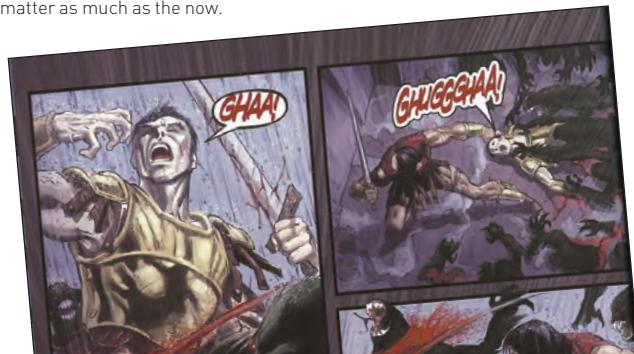
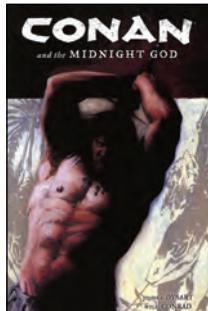
CONAN AND THE MIDNIGHT GOD

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse Books
Writer: Joshua Dysart
Artist: Will Conrad
Price: R149

WITH A NATION TO rule and an heir on the way, King Conan has put aside his sword in favour of diplomacy and the demands of the crown."

Yeah, it's obvious that the whole 'King of Aquilonia' business wasn't going to last forever with Conan. In fact, it only lasts as long as it does because Conan got hitched to Zenobia and there's a little Barbarian in the oven. So he does what any true man would do and takes it like a man. No more wild adventures, no more lamenting women. Nope, the Cimmerian rules his kingdom like a good and just but bored and moody King. But he still gets laid every night and considers his life just fine.

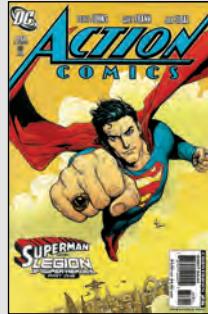
Until they mess with his woman. A sinister Stygian sorcerer attacks his girl and Conan goes crazy. He marches the entire Aequilonian army across the land right up to Stygia, and then deftly the dumbass forward-somersaults straight into the depths of hell where a force threatens to overwhelm all of Hyboria. But that's why we like Conan: he's a man of action and once the philosophy and talking is done in *Midnight God*, action is what you get. It is classic *Conan*. If you've never picked up a *Conan* before, he's the type of character where the past and the future don't matter as much as the now.



ACTION COMICS #858

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: DC
Writer: Geoff Johns
Artist: Gary Frank
Price: R26.50

ACTION COMICS (FEATURING SUPERMAN) is one of DC's main titles, with this current series running since 1938. But don't be dismayed; it's never too late to start reading, as most ongoing comic series run in smaller story arches of about four to six issues. So it's always easy to start reading one of the longer running comic series even if you don't have the earlier issues. That being said, *Action Comics* issue 858 kicks off a new story, where Superman finds himself called on by an old friend from the Legion of Superheroes for help. But when he traverses time in order to help them, he discovers that he may now be more of a hindrance than a help to his friends in this future world, which has been turned upside down, and things are not how they had seemed.



WALK IN

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Virgin Comics
Writer: Jeff Parker
Artist: Ashish Padlekar
Price: R149

WHAT IS A WALK IN? According to a 'psychic' in the book, it's a person who was taken over by a powerful spirit. Ian is not sure of that, but of a few things he is certain. He definitely can see people's auras and read their minds. He even sees octopuses on some. When he ends up in Moscow, he uses his talents to land him a job at a strip club, because he wants to befriend a specific stripper. But he is being watched and little does he know that his powers are going to land him in a world of strange trouble.

Walk In is the creation of Dave Stewart, probably best known for the Eurythmics. Apparently it's not far from a true story; that's if the introduction is to be believed. Not that that matters - this is a good read with really nice stylised visuals to back it up. The pace is slow at first, but it picks up and by the time you are half-way it's a gripping read. Another hit from Virgin!



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RAVEN'S LOFT

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE



THIS MONTH, I'LL WASTE no time getting started, because this time around I'll be discussing tempo and efficiency in Magic: The Gathering. So, let's get on with it...

TEMPO

Have you ever wondered why it is that the player who plays first in a Magic game doesn't get to draw a card on the first turn? It is because that player starts with the tempo advantage, and the 'no draw' rule is designed to offset that advantage somewhat so that the outcome of a match is less dependent on luck with coin-flipping while determining who goes first. The idea that the player with the first move holds the initiative and is (usually) at an advantage as a result is not only found in Magic. The granddaddy of strategy games, chess, also exhibits this property. In fact, at grandmaster levels of play, a large percentage of games are drawn, and the vast majority of the rest are won by the white player - black very seldom wins a game. The reason for this is very simple: the player who goes first generally gets to dictate what happens by being the first to initiate anything, while the player going second is forced to play reactively, and look for a hole to exploit.

While the player who plays first starts with the initiative, this doesn't mean that he or she will necessarily retain it. The basic idea behind tempo (in the context of Magic) is that you need to be acting all the time. Every turn, permanents untap, rendering them usable again. To let them lie idle is, in the most general terms, inefficient and a surrender of tempo. For example, if you leave your mana untapped without any plans to use it in your opponent's turn, when it comes around to your turn again, it has accomplished nothing

(ain fallow, as it were). Bear in mind that there are exceptions: a counter-spell-based deck will want to keep mana open, and will often not use it if there was nothing to counter in the opponent's turn (though creatures with 'flash' come in handy here, allowing the blue player to acquire tempo).

So what constitutes losing tempo? General inactivity, in the broadest sense, but also some specific actions. Having your creature returned to your hand costs you tempo, as in where it was going to attack, and you'll have to re-spend mana (which you may not even have at this point, requiring you to wait till the next turn) to recast it. Something like a Riftwing Cloudskate, which returns a permanent to its controller's hand when it comes in, steals tempo in a big way - you gain a creature, your opponent has to recast his or hers. Creatures with haste have built-in tempo gain, as they get to side-step 'summoning sickness', meaning that even if they are subsequently returned to your hand or killed, they may have already gotten their attack in.

MANA EFFICIENCY

Efficient use of mana ties into the issue of tempo. Say, for example, that you have two two-casting-cost and one three-casting-cost spells in hand. Assuming for the time being that they are all creatures, or otherwise beneficial to cast, then on turn three you should cast the three-casting-cost spell, so that if you drop a fourth land in turn four, you can cast both two-casting-cost spells. This is, of course, a gross simplification and generalisation, but the basic principle applies. This way of thinking carries an important implication: plan ahead. In the

FEELING LUCKY?

The Luckshack (www.luckshack.co.za) has been upgrading its facilities once again. The site's repertoire of available cards has also been expanded. Furthermore, they now offer to buy players' excess rares, which is a much-needed outlet for those players who don't get to trade with others much. Check out the site.

aforementioned example, if that fourth land was already in your hand, the fourth-turn double-play is guaranteed if you make the right play this turn. However, even if your fourth land is not already in your hand, it doesn't hurt to understand that you might draw it next turn - make your own luck (but that's a whole topic for another occasion!).

Ultimately, be aware that most games of Magic are races of one sort or another. If you are both playing aggressive decks, then the first player to get off the starting block has the edge, and the two of you are racing to deal lethal damage - so maintaining tempo, or wresting it from your opponent, is critical. If one of you is playing a control deck, then that player is trying to stabilise before the other gets through with lethal damage or another win condition - once again, it's a race.

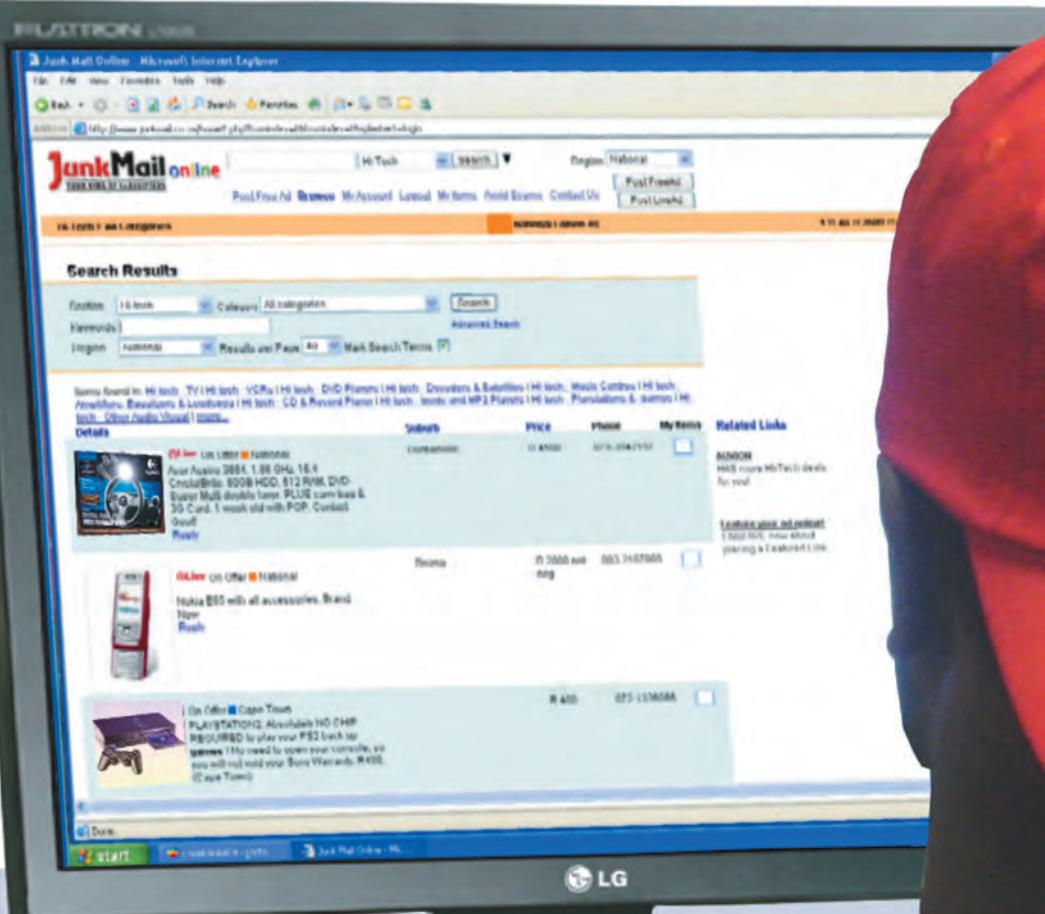
FINAL NOTE

Tempo is not the be-all and end-all, despite how important it is. In some rare instances, a deck is so dependent on developing card advantage in order to gain inevitability that it may be appropriate for it to cede the privilege of playing first. Take, for instance, a red-white deck that works by means of Pyroclasts and Wrath of God. This deck may well want the opponent to play first, thus being deprived of an additional card and to play out some creatures first for a multi-for-one trade with a mass removal spell. Another example could be a deck that relies on The Rack or Lavaborn Muse to deal damage to a light hand, with discard spells to encourage this - depriving the opponent of that first draw gets him/her one card closer to taking damage. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

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- SATA 80/100/120/160 GB HDD
- DVD Super-Multi with Light Scribe
- Built-in 1.3 mega-pixel webcam